FANTASY FILM CHRISTMAS PREVIEW

REALMS OF FANTASY

www.rofmagazine.com

Curtis 02271

Frodo's Return

The LOTR Experience

Brian FROUD:

Goblins Are Back!

Wizards, Warriors, & More

ALL NEW FANTASY STORIES

The Latest Fantasy

GAMES

December 2004

$3.99US $5.99CAN

12

0 74470 02271 8

RETAILER: DISPLAY UNTIL DEC. 27

FOR MILLIONS WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO LIVE BY
SWORD AND SORCERY, A NEW BATTLE RAGES.

WHERE ADVENTURE COMES ALIVE™

SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS A SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT GAME
STARRING YOURSELF ANTONIA BAYLE LUCAN D'LERE AND THOUSANDS OF OTHER PLAYERS
MUSIC BY LAURA KARPMAN DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY YOU FEATURING THE QUEST OF A LIFETIME

TEEN
T
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
Game Experience May Change During Online Play

AVAILABLE ON:
PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE
PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

WWW.EVERQUEST2.COM

The way it's meant to be played
NVIDIA

Runs great on
intel inside pentium 4
PENTIUM 4 PROCESSOR WITH HT TECHNOLOGY BRINGS EQII TO LIFE.

SOE
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

HOW WILL YOU FIGHT THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH?

Command any of four different armies, each with their own unique playing styles, resource management and base-building techniques.

Lead your army to victory in epic battles like the unforgettable Siege of Minas Tirith.

Fight for good or evil as your army experiences emotions in battle.

TEEN T ESRB Violence

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

Best of E3 2002

BEST OF E3 2002

NEW LINE CINEMA

Middle-earth awaits your command. Develop your own real time strategies to achieve victory in the epic battles of the film trilogy. Whether you seek the One Ring or seek to destroy it, the fate of Middle-earth is in your hands. Begin the battle at eagames.com

THE LORD OF THE RINGS
THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

EA GAMES

Challenge Everything

© MMIV New Line Productions, Inc. All Rights Reserved. The Lord of the Rings and the names of the characters, items, events and places therein are trademarks of The Saul Zaentz Company d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises under license to New Line Productions, Inc. Game Code and Gordian Knot © 2004 Electronic Arts Inc. All Rights Reserved. Electronic Arts, "Challenge Everything," EA, EA GAMES and the EA GAMES logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Electronic Arts Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. EA GAMES™ is an Electronic Arts™ brand.

contents

COVER and RIGHT: The magic of *The Lord of the Rings* movies returns to Boston in an exhibit of special effects, costumes, and make-up. See story on page 70. BELOW: Brian Froud's GOBLINS! return. See story on page 12.

REALMS OF FANTASY (ISSN 1078-1951) is published bimonthly by Sovereign Media Co., Inc., 453 Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 20170, (703) 964-0361. Periodical Rate postage paid at Herndon, VA, and additional mailing offices. REALMS OF FANTASY, Volume 11, Number 2 © 2004 by Sovereign Media. All rights reserved. Copyrights to stories and illustrations are the property of their creators. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. *Subscription Services, back issues, and information* call 800-219-1187 or write to REALMS OF FANTASY P.O. Box 1623, Williamsport, PA 17703. Single copies: $4.00, plus $1 for postage to Sovereign Media. Yearly subscription in U.S.A.: $16.95; Canada and Overseas: $21.95 (U.S.). Send editorial mail to: REALMS OF FANTASY, P.O. Box 527, Ramsan, NJ 07740. REALMS OF FANTASY welcomes editorial submissions but assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Material to be returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We suggest that you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Sovereign Media for our author's guidelines. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to REALMS OF FANTASY, P.O. Box 1623, Williamsport, PA 17703.**

departments

8 CONTRIBUTORS

12 MOVIES
By Resa Nelson
The Lord of the Rings Exhibition offers fans a ticket to Middle-earth.

18 BOOKS
By Gahan Wilson and Paul Witcover
Two new fantasy anthologies are a good reason to welcome the end of the year.

24 FOLKROOTS
By Gregory Frost
Storytellers, artists, and academics take part in the conference with a thousand faces.

32 PAST LIVES
By Emma Bull
Clothes can make the historical reenactor.

70 GALLERY
By Ari Berk
International best-selling artist, author, and fairy authority Brian Froud and folklorist, goblinologist, and author Ari Berk once again join forces, lifting the moldy latch and opening the door to the world of GOBLINS!

88 GAMES
By Eric T. Baker
DragonMech serves up a world of medieval fantasy with a twist.

fiction

42 THE CARDINAL'S CATS
By Cherith Baldry
Your loving and loyal cat will always come to your rescue. Well, if it means her own comfort is at stake.

50 SONNETS MADE OF WOOD
By Leah Bobet
The mermaid will always return to the sea, but not, perhaps in the way she might wish.

56 THE CHAMBER OF FORGETTING
By Sarah Prineas
If you remember your past, are you condemned to relive it? If you forget who you were, can you know who you should be?

64 THE WILD MAN
By Caitlin Matthews
To shake off memory and humanity and live as the beasts of the forests–for some it is punishment, for others a blessing.

76 THE SECRET OF MAKING BRAINS
By Joe Murphy
Life is made up of shades of gray, and we are all confronted by choices each day. That's what makes us human, isn't it?

84 TALENT
By Laura Anne Gilman
When you've got the gift, sometimes you have to give it to someone else. Even if you don't want to.

Designers of Swords & Medieval Weaponry

Knights Edge LTD.

Since 1994

FREE Full Color CATALOG within the USA $5 Elsewhere

We are one of the leading designers of weaponry spanning the timelines of history!

If you want Real Hand Forged Steel Blades of Pure Function and Form... insist only on Ritter Steel for quality you can trust!

Our exclusive design lines include:

Ritter Steel
Hand Forged | Functional Weaponry

Valiant Arms
Armour & Weaponry

KNIGHTEDGE
Stag Hunting Cutlery
Made in the USA

Stage Steel
Rattle Ready | Steel Swords

Ritter Steel
Authentics Collection™

Knights Edge Ltd. 5696 N Northwest Hwy. Dept RF35, Chicago, IL 60646 USA
773-775-3888 Fax 773-775-3339 Visit us at www.KnightsEdge.com

DEALER INQUIRES ARE WELCOME!

contributors

ERIC T. BAKER was born in Reno, Nevada, but has lived in Fairfax, Virginia, since 1979. He holds a degree in English from Virginia Tech and was a graduate of Clarion in 1989. Eric sold his first story in 1992, but it was his third sale that appeared in print first. His work has appeared in *Amazing, Fantasy & Science Fiction,* and *Science Fiction Age.*

ARI BERK is a folklorist, poet, visual artist, and scholar of literature, iconography, and comparative myth. Deeply dedicated to interdisciplinary writing, teaching, and research, Dr. Berk holds degrees in Ancient History (B.A.), American Indian Studies (M.A.), and Comparative Literature and Culture (Ph.D.). He has studied at Oxford and traveled widely, making friends in many parts of the world. Associate professor of English at Central Michigan University, he teaches courses in Mythology, Folklore, American Indian studies, and Medieval literature. Dr. Berk's essays, poetry, and art can be found (along with all the previous Folkroots articles) on the Endicott Studio for Mythic Arts web site: www.endicott-studio.com. His book (with internationally known artist Brian Froud) *The Runes of Elfland,* explores the otherworldly aspects of landscape and language. His forthcoming collaboration with Froud, *Goblins!* is due this Fall.

GREGORY FROST is the author of, most recently, the novel *Fitcher's Brides,* a retelling of the fairytale of "Bluebeard;" and of the stories "Tengu Mountain" in the new anthology *The Faery Reel* (edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Winding) and "Dub" in the very odd anthology *Weird Trails* (edited by Michael Szymanski). A collection of his short fiction, *Attack of the Jazz Giants and Other Stories,* will be published by Golden Gryphon Press in 2005. His previous Folkroots columns can be found on the Endicott Studio for Mythic Arts Web site: www.endicott-studio.com.

LAURA ANNE GILMAN is a professional writer and editor with more than twenty short story credits to her name, in magazines such as *Realms of Fantasy, Horror Garage, Flesh & Blood,* and *Amazing Stories.* She has also been featured in anthologies such as *Murder by Magic, Powers of Detection,* and *Revisions.* Her first original fantasy novel, *Staying Dead* was released this year. For more information: www.sff.net/people/lauraanne.gilman

CAITLÍN MATTHEWS is a world authority on Celtic traditions. Her fiction includes *Celtic Love: Ten Enchanting Tales* ,and *Tarot Tales* with Rachel Pollack. She has written 40 non-fiction books, including the most accessible guides to the British myth cycle, the Mabinogion, *Mabon and the Heroes of Celtic Britain,* and *King Arthur and the Goddess of the Land* (Inner Traditions). She also teaches worldwide. For details of her books, events, and courses, see: *www.hallowquest.org.uk*

JOE MURPHY lives with his wife Veleta, a watercolor artist in Fairbanks Alaska. He's been writing seriously now for twelve years. His work has appeared in *Age of Wonders, A Horror Day: 365 Scary Stories, Bones of the World, Book of All Flesh, Book of the Bold, Strange Horizons,* and many others. A member of SFWA, HWA, and a Clarion graduate, Joe also works as a youth counselor with emotionally involved kids.

RESA NELSON is a freelance writer and a Clarion '85 graduate. She has sold short stories and novelettes to *Science Fiction Age, Brutarian Quarterly, Paradox, Oceans of the Mind,* and other magazines and anthologies. She produced and/or wrote the screenplays for three short independent films made in the Boston area which have been screened at ReaderCon, and WordCon. As a swordsman, she studies medieval weaponry at the Higgins Armory Museum, where she sometimes gives demonstrations. Visit her Web site at: www.resanelson.com

GAHAN WILSON's cartoons are known chiefly because of his affiliation with *Playboy* magazine, but have shown up in periodicals as diverse as *The New Yorker, Weird Tales,* and *Paris Match,* and on the cover of *Newsweek.* Gahan is also a talented writer whose often-macabre fiction has appeared in *Omni* and the original *Dangerous Visions.* He created a CD-ROM entitled *Gahan Wilson's Ultimate Haunted House,* demonic baseball cards, and a telefilm for Showtime. He makes his home on Long Island.

CORRECTION: Due to an editing error in the Folkroots section of the October issue, quotes that should have been attributed to the classical authors on pages 19-22 (Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Pliny, and Pomponius Mela) were printed as part of Dr. Berk's narrative, and not indented or attributed. All of these texts were properly cited in the original text Dr. Berk sent to *Realms of Fantasy.* Our apologies for any confusion this might have caused.

REALMS OF FANTASY

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 2

CARL A. GNAM, JR.
Editorial Director

SHAWNA MCCARTHY
Editor

CHRISTOPHER R. D'AMORE
Assistant Editor

JESSE GUAY
Graphic Designer

CARINA GONZALEZ
Editorial Intern

KERRY STINSON
Copy Editor

Contributors:

Eric T. Baker, Cherith Baldry, Ari Berk, Leah Bobet, Gregory Frost, Laura Anne Gilman, Caitlin Matthews, Joe Murphy, Resa Nelson, Sarah Prineas, Gahan Wilson, Paul Witcover

MARK HINTZ
Chief Executive Officer

DIANE BONIFANTI
Business Manager

TINA POUST
Comptroller

KATHY PAULHAMUS
MARY NOLAN
SANDRA HILLYARD
Subscription Customer Service

Curtis Circulation Company
Worldwide Distribution

Advertising Offices:

COLIN T. SMITH
Advertising Manager
(703)964-0361, Ext. 22

453 Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 20170
703-964-0361 / FAX: 703-964-0366

Subscription Customer Service and Business Office

The Hart Building, 30 W. Third Street
Williamsport, PA 17701
(800) 219-1187

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

mordor, tatooine, greyhawk, and Space Mountain

Gen Con So Cal is the perfect setting for any game. . . located smack in the middle of paradise and merely a d20 roll away from Disneyland.

You have four marathon days and nights to reach the deepest dungeons, furthest worlds, and most distant lands. But you won't be alone. Thousands of gamers will be here to join you, up for almost any RPG, TCG, board or electronic game adventure imaginable. And for even more heart-pounding thrills, all you have to do is cross the street.

- Thousands of events & tournaments, featuring Upper Deck Entertainment Pro Circuit
- Hundreds of game companies & vendors – do all your holiday shopping right here!
- Save the day when you enter True Heroes,™ a life-size, walk-through Marvel Super Heroes experience
- Enter the fray in the life-size True Dungeon!™
- Go Speed Racer Go to the Anime Room
- Get plugged in at the LAN Arena
- The bidding starts at the Game Auction
- See the best of fantasy & sci-fi at the Art Show
- Get creative for the infamous Costume Contest

Get ready for the ride of your life – register at the Anaheim Convention Center starting 5 pm, December 1, and get the latest updates, event schedule and more online at

www.gencon.com

SO CAL
GEN CON
THE BEST FOUR DAYS IN GAMING!

December 2-5, 2004
Anaheim convention center
Anaheim, CA

Origins Game Fair Celebration III
APRIL 21-24, 2005

INDY GEN CON
AUGUST 18-21, 2005

GEN CON, the Gen Con logo, and The Best Four Days In Gaming! are trademarks of Gen Con LLC. All rights reserved. Used under authorization.

WILL YOU FIGHT FOR THE FELLOWSHIP?
OR DESTROY IT?

"THE MOST EXCITING RPG SINCE FINAL FANTASY."
– Electronic Gaming Monthly

RATING PENDING
RP
Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.
ESRB

PlayStation 2

XBOX

GAMECUBE

GAME BOY ADVANCE

NEW LINE CINEMA

LORD OF THE RINGS
THE THIRD AGE

EA GAMES

By Rosa Nelson

The Lord of the Rings Exhibition offers fans a ticket to Middle-earth.

The entrance is surrounded by runes, but what does it mean? Is it a welcome or a warning? You step into the dimly lit dark cavern, and there's a Cave Troll lunging at you! You've stumbled onto Balin's Tomb! A goblin hovers in the background as the Cave Troll snarls, glassy-eyed, and it reaches for you. The best choice is to run away. You're in luck. Just a few steps away you find Narsil—the sword that cut the Ring off Sauron's hand—no longer in shards, but whole and solid. You grasp the hilt with both hands, raising the sword, ready for battle with the Cave Troll.

"Heavy, isn't it?" says the museum interpreter. She holds the point of the sword down on the display table as you lift the hilt. There will be no brandishing of swords in a room full of museum goers, even if the room is as big as a cavern.

But it really is Narsil. It was held by Viggo Mortensen when he played Aragorn. And now it's in your hands.

The Cave Troll can wait. Although he's towering and life size, he's just a sculpture made by the WETA Workshop for this touring exhibit, The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy: The Exhibition. In partnership with New Line Cinema, the exhibition was developed and first displayed at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. This year it's traveled to London, Singapore, and now to Boston as its one and only stop in the United States, from August 1 through October 24. The next stop on the tour is the Power House Museum in Sydney, Australia.

Defending Middle earth against the armies of darkness, Viggo Mortensen and Liv Tyler wield some of the most intricately crafted weapons ever created for a film.

To answer the museum interpreter's question, yes, Narsil is quite heavy. Contrary to popular thought, medieval swords typically weighed just two or three pounds, and that's including long swords. Narsil feels much heavier in the hand than a true medieval sword. Despite its heft, it's not easy to part company with the sword.

Then again, as you look around, you feel as if you've just landed in a Middle-Earth warehouse storing hundreds of artifacts.

From the beginning, I didn't want to make your standard fantasy film," Peter Jackson said after filming his ground-breaking triad. "I wanted something that felt much, much more real. Tolkien writes in a way that makes everything come alive and we wanted to set that realistic feeling of an ancient world-come-to-life right away with the first film, then continue to build it as the story unravels."

Surrounded by props, weapons, armor, and jewelry, you see with your own eyes how real it all looks.

Costumes used in the trilogy are mounted on headless mannequins, scattered throughout the enormous, dimly lit room. Standing watch over Narsil is Aragorn's traveling costume. His long leather coat is scarred from battle. Mortensen aged the costume himself by taking it home, living in it, sweating in it, and repairing it. His goal was to grow into it, and his effort shows.

During the past few years, the filmmakers and especially the actors have emphasized how real the costumes and props look, especially in regard to the level of detail. Producer Barrie M. Osbourne

It Ends Here.

It Ends Now.

The final conflict. A pair of trusted companions.

The fate of the North, the freedom of Mithral Hall
and the lives of his companions all rest
in the skilful hands of Drizzt Do'Urden.

The Two Swords is the explosive finale
to the epic Hunter's Blades Trilogy
by *New York Times* best-selling author R.A. Salvatore

On Sale Everywhere
October 19, 2004

FORGOTTEN REALMS

went to New Zealand six years ago to meet with Peter Jackson. When Osbourne saw the costumes and weaponry for the first time, he described them as "museum quality." When he walked past shelves and racks of Elven armor, he knew he'd signed up for something special.

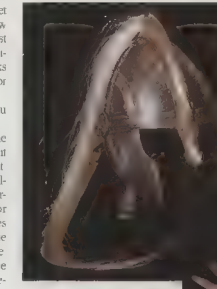
As you wander through the exhibit, you take in the overwhelming detail.

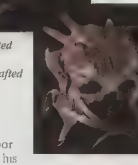
Elijah Wood says, "The art design in the movie is unbelievable, because not only is it beautiful but so much thought went into it. Rivendale has its own look and its own culture. There are pieces of pottery and silverware that are designed specifically for Rivendale—that's what the Rivendale elves would use. There are details in the movie that you'll never even notice. For example in Balin's tomb, on the walls there are dwarvish runes that actually mean something. Those things are amazing to me."

While running away from the Cave Troll, you might have noticed those dwarvish runes. But now that you're in a calmer and more peaceful place, you notice the Elvish artifacts: there's Galadriel's ring, the Evenstar necklace and Elrond's crown and ring of power.

There's also a large Elven telescope. When I think of a telescope, I imagine a long, cylindrical object. That's not how Elves make telescopes. The lenses aren't encased in a cylinder. Instead, three glass lenses are framed and supported by a large structure made up of delicate curves, like a branching vine, about the size of a spinning wheel. Made of brass, steel, and copper, it holds the lenses several feet apart and in straight alignment, like an "open air" version of a telescope. It's one of those artifacts that Wood raves about, cleverly woven into the background of the films.

Past the Elven shields and swords, bows and arrows, lie the Rohan artifacts, including





ABOVE A steel helmet crafted for the soldiers of Rohan. RIGHT A leather helmet crafted for Saruman's formidable Uruk-hai warriors

King Theoden's armor.

Bernard Hill, who portrayed Theoden, recalls his first glimpse of the culture his character ruled. "I went down the WETA Workshop and Richard Taylor, a wonderful guy who runs the whole thing, showed me around and said, 'Let me show you your section.' The Rohan section.' There was this line of spears in racks down one of the aisles, and I thought, 'This is fantastic.'

Karl Urban, who plays Eomer, Theoden's nephew remembers, "Throughout the film, the attention to detail was incredible down to the smallest little engravings, stuff that would never be seen by the audience. My costume was a layer of leather, underneath it, a layer of wool, then a layer of chain mail, and then a tough leather armor over the top of that. Commonly, I would be wearing greaves on my legs and braces on my arms, and I'd also be wielding a shield and carrying a sword. The first time I put the wardrobe on and attempted to walk, I just about keeled over—the floorboards were creaking."

Just past the Rohan artifacts is a sight to make your heart stand still. Tucked in a far corner of the black cavern of the exhibition room is a canoe like boat made by Elves. You approach slowly, reverently. Lying inside is the dead body of Boromir, looking as if he's just been killed while trying to protect Merry and Pippin. Now he's prepared to be sent down the river and over the water. His head lies on his shield, and the hilt of his sword rests in his lifeless hands, the blade balanced down the length of his body, pointed toward his toes. Maybe your eyes well up for a moment because he looks so real.

But the moment is broken by rollicking laughter behind you. There's a line of people waiting to try out one of the interactive exhibits, and they're giggling as they find out what it's like to be Frodo and Gandalf.

There's a small set and two cameras to demonstrate low tech trick photography. The set recreates an early scene in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, in which Frodo hops into a cart driven by Gandalf as he arrives in Hobbiton for Bilbo Baggins' birthday party.

Here's how it works. The cart is split in half, made up of two separate pieces on opposite sides of the set. Frodo's side of the cart is oversized, making whoever sits in it look tiny. Gandalph's side of the cart is regular size. There are two cameras. One

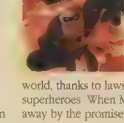
CHRISTMAS 2004 MOVIE PREVIEW

With the holiday season approaching, look for these fantasy and horror movies and TV miniseries.

October 29 *The Grudge* (Sony Pictures) stars Sarah Michelle Gellar in an American remake of a 2003 Japanese horror flick called *Ju-On*. It's about a killer curse that

murders its victims, then generates a new curse, so it spreads like a virus. The Grudge comes from Sam Raimi's Ghost House Pictures and Taka Ichise, who produced Japan's Ringu, the movie on which *The Ring* is based.

November 5 *The Incredibles* (Pixar Animation Studios and Walt Disney Pictures) is a CG-animated movie starring the voices of Craig T. Nelson and Holly Hunter as married superheroes who are forced to hide their powers and work boring day jobs instead of saving the world, thanks to lawsuits filed against all superheroes. When Mr. Incredible is lured away by the promise that he can go back into action, he ends up in trouble, and his family must rescue him.



November 10 *The Polar Express* (Warner Brothers) is another CG offering, starring the voice and computer-generated image of Tom Hanks as the conductor of a train that runs on Christmas Eve, sweeping children up to the North Pole where they can meet Santa and a city full of elves. The movie is adapted from the award-winning children's book by Chris Van Allsburg.

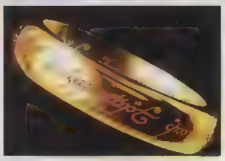
November 24 Nicholas Cage stars as Benjamin Franklin Gates in *National Treasure* (Touchstone Pictures). He believes tales of a great treasure that was intended to fund the American Revolution but was hidden by our founding fathers. When Gates learns there's a treasure map drawn in invisible ink of the back of The Declaration of Independence, he realizes he has to steal the famous document in order to protect it.

shoots Frodo's side of the cart, and the other shoots Gandalph's side The cameras are placed at different distances from the cart sections, but when they film, there's one seamless image displayed on a screen above the set. People try it out two at a time, one sitting on either Frodo's or Gandalf's section of the cart and looking either hobbit-sized or wizard-sized on screen. When they switch places and suddenly shrink or grow on screen, everyone laughs

Nearby, there's another example of how a century-old perspective trick was used Inside a display case stands a table with an unusual top it's very broad at one end and very narrow on the other. Cutouts representing Gandalf and Bilbo sit at each end of the table. Gandalf has an undersized mug, while Bilbo's is oversized. Now, step to the left of the display case and look through the peephole on the side. You look over Gandalf's shoulder down at Bilbo at the other end All of sudden, it's as if you're in Bilbo's house, having a drink with him From this perspective, the cutout of Bilbo and the oversized mug look Hobbit-sized, while Gandalf and his mug look Wizard-sized It's because you've moved your point of view, and the set up tricks the eye. From this angle, the table doesn't look as long as it really is, and everything on the far end looks very small Thanks to the different table widths at each end, the table itself looks normal

So that's how they did it

On the other end of the spectrum, there are plenty of high-tech interactive exhibits For example, you can find out what your face would look like in stone, like the kings of Gondor, and watch technology in action First, you go into the 3-D scanning booth. A laser beam scans your face, then a camera reads the results, which are calculated into thousands of reference points. A computer program connects the dots with straight lines The result is a series of flat shapes that are joined together like a polygon mesh The image is smoothed into a stone-like image when the computer fills in the gaps



TOP: A towering model of the Cave Troll looms over onlookers ABOVE: One ring to rule them all!

Your next stop might be the motion-capture activity, where you can grab a foam sword and sheild, then perform your best fighting moves in front of a camera. A computer translates those movements into digital action, demonstrating the technique used to create Gollum

There's also a scaling wall that looks like a line-up in a police station, where you stand next to images of Frodo, Gandalf, an Orc, and a Cave Troll One at a time, visitors approach the scaling wall and stand underneath an ultrasonic sensor that detects height. For each visitor, a recorded voice announces a snappy judgment. With my heart in my throat, I ran up to the wall and took my place between Gandalf and the Orc. "Hmm," the voice says. "You seem to be a tall dwarf "

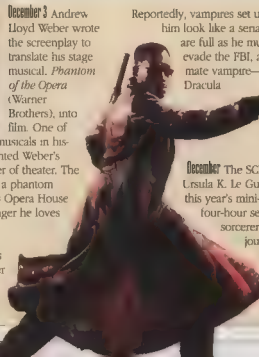
I beam. Standing at my straightest, I'm not quite 5'2". I take it as a compliment.

Ironically, one of the most important technological advances for the trilogy came from the New Zealand sheep industry, where meat inspectors use a hand-held laser scanner to check for shrinkage in the meat When Jackson's team got their hands on the sheep scanner, they found it had a multitude of uses. First, they used it to clothe computer-generated characters, for example, by putting Orc faces or armor on them. They also used it to create digital versions of the lead actors, such as Orlando Bloom in the scene where Legolas runs up the tusk of a mumakil Best of all, the sheep laser saved the filmmakers an enormous amount of time. Remember the Cave Troll? Here's how they created him. First, they sculpted a highly detailed 3-D model of the troll. The sheep laser allowed them to scan that model directly into the computer, saving the long hours they'd normally have to spend fine-tuning the details and resolution of a computer generated image

They also used the sheep scanner to create digital environments by making a model and scanning it. This exhibit is full of such models. There's the 20-foot-high, Orthanc Tower, detailed with tiny windows that look like they're made from bottle glass There's Barad-dur, the dark tower of Mordor, standing at a mere eight feet high, which is 1·500 scale. And then there's the Hobbiton Mill,

December 3 Andrew Lloyd Weber wrote the screenplay to translate his stage musical, *Phantom of the Opera* (Warner Brothers), into film. One of the most successful musicals in history, *Phantom* cemented Weber's reputation as a master of theater. The classic story is about a phantom who haunts the Paris Opera House and Christine, the singer he loves

December 18 Wesley Snipes *(right)* returns as the vampire hunter in the third and final Blade movie *Blade Trinity*



Reportedly, vampires set up Blade to make him look like a serial killer His hands are full as he must fight vampires, evade the FBI, and face the ultimate vampire—Dracula

December The SCI FI Channel turns Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* into this year's mini-series event. The four-hour series is about a sorcerer-in-training whose journey includes fighting dragons, falling in love, and crossing death's threshold before he can gain the power he needs to reunite his world Earthsea stars Isabella Rosselini as High Priestess Thar and Danny Glover as master wizard Ogion.

December TNT presents a made-for-TV movie starring Noah Wyle as *The Librarian.* Wyle stumbles upon this job, but quickly finds out his role is to protect a secret library full of lost treasures ranging from the Golden Fleece to the Ark of the Convenant With Dean Devlin *(Independence Day)* as executive producer and David Titcher *(Around the World in 80 Days)* as writer, *The Librarian* is a big action adventure fantasy that could be the first of a series of TV movies.

about the size of a small car, which took three months to make

During the design phase of the trilogy, the filmmakers turned to conceptual artists Alan Lee and John Howe for help, because they illustrated the HarperCollins editions of *The Lord of the Rings* decades ago. Many of their sketches hang on the walls among today's artifacts Those sketches were used to create storyboards, then the scale models, such as Hobbiton Mill

"As a conceptual artist, it is quite a minefield treading through Tolkien's world," Lee says. "But you somehow have to trust your own judgment and your own vision Tolkien's descriptions are so beautiful and poetic, yet he has left plenty of room for us to make our own little explorations.

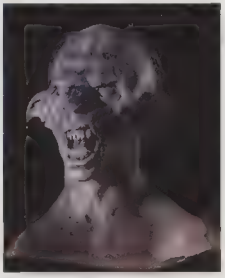
"When Peter Jackson said he wanted to be as true to the spirit of the books as he could and try to create very, very real landscapes and as believable a world as possible, I knew I was the right person for the job."

Just past Hobbiton Mill is a wall of horror It's as if you've just stumbled onto an archaeological dig site—as if someone has scraped a window showing layers and layers of discarded artifacts tossed into a garbage dump Instead of seeing layers of broken vases and pots, you see layers of body parts. Mostly, it's Hobbit feet and ears layered among Orc teeth and faces.

Cate Blanchett, who plays Galadriel, probably wouldn't blanch at this gruesome site "I have to admit I have always wanted to have pointy ears!" she says

Perhaps there's a pair layered in there somewhere that once graced her ears Then again, maybe not. Three large foam ovens ran 24 hours a day, seven days a week for three and a half years to produce these prosthetics. For the four lead Hobbits alone, those ovens produced 2,000 pairs of feet. The prosthetics are so delicate that each can only be used once because removing it destroys it.

Beyond the wall of horror stands a long row of suits of armor, looking like a display you'd typically find in an arms and armor museum But these were worn by men from Gondor and Elves and Uruk-Hai The full suits are complete, including helmets, mail, belts, cloaks, weapons, and boots. By the last suit of armor, there's a sample of medieval helmets, and it's easy to see the influence of past cultures, such as the goggle helmet from the Viking era



ABOVE LEFT Sir Ian McKellen transformed into Gandalf the Gray. ABOVE A highly detailed Orc mask from the WETA workshop, made of latex foam silicone, and implanted with yak hair

Like ancient armor you might find in a museum, these suits are well worn, looking as though they belong to ancient civilizations

"The contribution of Richard Taylor and Tania Rodger and their WETA Workshop has been essential," Jackson says. "They truly understood my desire to make every inch of this production feel real. Right down to the pitted, greasy, dirty armor, WETA has gone the extra distance to get the details right."

While examining the suits of armor, an eerie sense of unease creeps up on you. It's like knowing when someone is watching you. You turn slowly . . and sure enough, a Ringwraith is hovering over your shoulder

After jumping out of your skin, you edge cautously toward the display case next to it. Inside is a Ringwraith riding harness, surrounded by Ringwraith crowns and weapons, everything rusted and gouged, as if from centuries of use

It's a bit too realistic. Shuddering, you round the corner and discover a great number of Gandalf's scrolls from the library at Minas Tirith, piled in stacks behind his shoulder bag and Narya, his ring of power Like all the other artifacts, the scrolls show wear and tear. They're stained and tattered. Some of the scrolls are open, and they're full of text. You pause for a moment and read, "They loved best the plains and delighted in horses."

Around the corner is a darker kind of collection Palentir, the seeing stone, rests on black velvet, its black surface encircled by fog-like strands of white. There's an odd group of items that look like they might belong in an apothecary shop: small animal skeletons, a human skull with a pony tail still attached .. and the illustrated Book of Saruman.

Another towering figure catches your eye, but this time it's Treebeard leaning out from a nearby wall. He stares down at you, his shiny eyes full of compassion and intelligence. Encouraged, you forge straight ahead. Beyond Gandalf's white robes, Gimli's armor, and Galadriel's dress is a Hobbit collection. First, there's Frodo's costume (Hobbit-sized, not Elijah-Wood sized) Then there's his sword Sting and Galadriel's gifts, including the Mithril vest that saved his life A lump might form in your throat at the sight of Bilbo Baggins' book, *There and Back Again*

There's one more place to explore. It's time to end the journey.

You go into the depths of the cavernous exhibit, then enter a small, dark room Its circular wall is ringed with images of glowing lava. The dark room is empty, except for a tall column of water encased in a clear cylinder that runs from floor to ceiling

Voices call out to you as you step closer. The voices of Gandalf and Gollum, Sam and Galadriel, Aragorn and Arwen. It's as if you've suddenly become Frodo. They're all telling you what to do with the Ring

And there it is, suspended in the column of water before you. The One Ring.

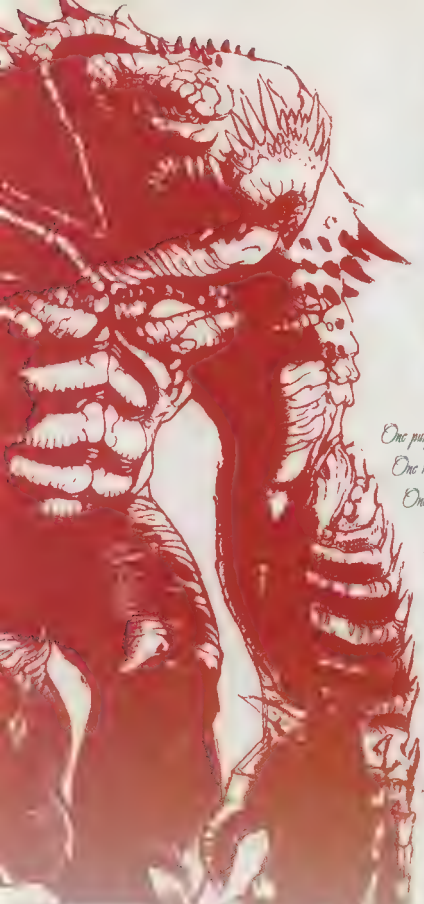
It's done It's finally over

"I love the concept that the fate of the world rests on the shoulders of these two little hobbits," says Urban. "It's the smaller, more innocent people who have to bear the ultimate burden—that appeals to me It also appeals to me that in this film there is a price to pay, and everyone pays

"In today's age of Hollywood films where heroes go through an incredible series of assaults and come out unscathed, if you think about it in terms of Lord of the Rings, practically every character actually pays a price. Whether it's loved ones who are lost, whether they personally themselves lose their lives, there's a massive price to pay in these films for freedom."

The One Ring is where it belongs, and you take one last, long look as you say goodby ❧

atari.com/demonstone.com



One purpose.
One motive.
One reason for existence.

Death.

Forgotten Realms

DEMON STONE

FROM THE DEVELOPERS OF THE BESTSELLING GAME
THE LORD OF THE RINGS™
THE TWO TOWERS™
COMES THE NEXT GREAT SAGA
OF GOOD AND EVIL

T
TEEN
ESRB
Blood
Violence

PlayStation.2

PC CD ROM

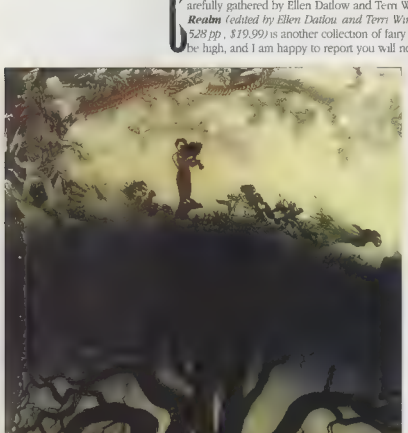
ATARI

Demon Stone, Forgotten Realms and the Forgotten Realms logo, Dungeons & Dragons, D&D, and the Dungeons & Dragons logo and Wizards of the Coast and its logo, Infogrames, Atari and the Atari logo are trademarks of the [illegible] and are used with permission. © 2004 Wizards. software. © 2004 Atari. Interactive Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. PlayStation and the PS Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox and the Xbox Logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft.

By Gahan Wilson

Two new fantasy anthologies are a good reason to welcome the end of the year.

Carefully gathered by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, ***The Faery Reel: Tales From the Twilight Realm*** *(edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, Viking/Penguin Group, New York, hardcover 528 pp., $19.99)* is another collection of fairy tales for grownups. I am sure your expectations will be high, and I am happy to report you will not be disappointed.



This piece from Charles Vess graces the cover of The Faery Reel: Tales From the Twilight, *giving us a taste of the offerings inside.*

As is the usual with their collections, this anthology contains works by some of the most well known authors of the fantastic, along with relatively unknown writers who manage to hold their own with the superstars very nicely.

A welcoming preface by both editors is followed by a delightful introduction by Windling which does a grand job of covering the ups and downs of Faery in both what we call "fantasy," and what we call "real life." On the factual side, it ranges from the spooky writings of Robert Kirk, who claimed to have personally visited *Fairyland*, to the touchingly unconvincing photographs which delighted dear old Conan Doyle by showing Victorian children gazing in awe and rapture at fairies. On the artistic side, she refers the reader not only to towering greats such as Blake and Yeats, but does a good job of analyzing how the genre has tumbled merrily from art, to kitch, and back again at various periods in its life. All in all, it gives one an excellent grounding in Faery and just to goose you along, there's a long list of "further reading" tucked away at the end of the book.

Clearly, the editors gave firm instructions to their authors that they do everything in their power to avoid falling into what the Brits call "twee" (which is a really great word) and we Yanks used to call "cutsey wootsey." It seems they've been told to not be shy of the grimmer side of faerydom, and to boldly cross the borders surrounding French and British lore, while freely exploring other realms of Faery such as those encountered in China, Japan, Mexico, and the Philippines.

The stories range from very good to outstanding and any list of favorites has to be arbitrary in the extreme. I found Tanith Lee's "Elvenbrood," a dark exploration of human and faery family relationships to be profoundly disturbing. I also was much amused by Bruce Glassco's "Never Never" which expands hilariously and very touchingly on Captain Hook's problems with Peter Pan and his transparently fascistic Neverland, and I believe I've been taught something highly important about humans and animals by Nina Kiriki Hoffman's "Immersed in Matter." Finally, I must freely confess I was particularly impressed by Gregory Maguire's The Oakthing, a very moving exploration of the stupidity of war and the persistent stoutness of heart of those who somehow manage to endure its idiocies.

There are also three lovely poems and a great quantity of excellent "decorations" (called that I assume because they bring to mind the delicate little etchings which used to perch on the heads and

HEROES WANTED

Thirst for adventure required. Must like dragons... in the *Science Fiction Book Club*.®

5 BOOKS FOR $1 WITH MEMBERSHIP

www.JoinSFBC.com

Your Online Code is located below on the order card.

Y869 ROF 12/01/04

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

Join Online at www.JoinSFBC.com Online Code: JS360

If you select a book that counts as 2 choices, write the first 4 digits of the book number in one row of boxes and 9999 in the next.

Please write book numbers here

☐ ***YES!*** Please enroll me in *The Science Fiction Club*® according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 5 BOOKS I've indicated. Bill me just $1, plus shipping and handling. I agree to buy 4 more books within the next 2 years.

Mr.
Mrs./Ms. _____
(please print)

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

Home telephone, please: (___) _____

Please sign (if under 18, parent must sign) _____

10 ### ### 64 92 JS360 ← ONLINE CODE

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Sales tax added where applicable. Membership subject to approval. Canadian members serviced from Canada where offer is slightly different.

SAVE MORE NOW! Send me this book now at a reduced cost. Bill me an added $4.98 plus shipping and handling. (Books that count as 2 choices are not eligible.)

Please write 6th book number here

The fastest way to join: www.JoinSFBC.com

Your Online Code is Located on the order card.

Prices shown were current at press time. Explicit scenes and/or language. ▪ Softcover edition. ▫ Omnibus edition. ◊ Hardcover edition exclusively for Club members. † Counts as two choices. § DRAGONLANCE® is a registered trademark by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All rights reserved. ™ and © 2003 DC Comics. All Rights Reserved. • © 2004 Keith Parkinson unless otherwise noted, presented by mp publishing. All rights reserved. ◦ Copyright © 2002 Wizards of the Coast. All rights reserved. ©2004 LucasFilm Ltd. & TM, used under Authorization. All Rights Reserved. ~HELLBOY SEED OF DESTRUCTION trademark and copyright © 1994, 1997 and 1999 Mike Mignola. ~ Copyright © 2003, 1902, 1903 and 1994 by Bruce Prose Wood Productions. ◦ Copyright ©1999 DC Comics. All rights reserved. Swamp Thing created by Len Wein and Berni Wrightson. ™ and © 2003 by Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. All rights reserved. △ © 2004 DC Comics. Elfquest is ™ & © Wary Graphics, Inc.

NO POSTAGE NECESSARY IF MAILED IN THE UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 41 CAMP HILL, PA

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

PO BOX 6367
CAMP HILL PA 17001-9112

XXXY

Just choose 5 books for $1. Send no money now. Your bill (including shipping and handling) will come when membership is confirmed, unless otherwise notified. **Your satisfaction is guaranteed.** If you're not happy with your introductory books, return them within 20 days at our expense. Your membership will be canceled, you'll owe nothing. **Save up to 65% off publishers' edition prices.** Every book we offer in a high-quality, full-text edition sometimes altered in size. Just purchase at least 4 more books at regular Club prices within 2 years. After buying 4 books you may resign at any time or remain a member for as long as you wish. **More savings now!** Buy a 6th book now for just $4.98, plus shipping and handling. **The FREE Club magazine** is sent to you up to 15 times a year (about every 3 weeks). Each issue reviews the Main Selections and a variety of alternate books. **Ordering is risk-free.** Main Selections are sent to you automatically. To cancel, write us or enter other books—simply return your Member Reply Form or contact our Web site by the marked date. Shipping and handling (plus sales tax, where applicable) is added to each order. You'll always have 10 days to decide. If your Member Reply Form is late and unwanted books arrive, you can return them at our expense and we'll credit your account. **Easy ordering** through the mail or via our Web site.

The Science Fiction Book Club® is a registered trademark of Doubleday Direct, Inc., used under license. All rights reserved.

Promotional images used for illustrative purposes only.

Y869

tails of stories and chapters in Victorian and Edwardian collections of fairy stories) drawn by Charles Vess. I enjoyed them all.

The Captain of the 'Pole Star' by Arthur Conan Doyle (Ash-Tree Press, Victoria, BC, hardcover, 460 pp., $46.00), is a collector's dream, a strange and wonderful trove of weird tales, indeed, because they are all the stories of their kind ever written by Arthur Conan Doyle.

It is quite easy to lay one's hands on the most feeble and least worthy of the Sherlock Holmes tales, as Michael Dirda points out in his preface, since each and every one of them have been reprinted again and again, in English and in every other language in the world. Outside of occasional appearances in various anthologies however, the bulk of the stories collected here have been totally unavailable outside of their early printings long, long ago. The first of the tales in this book, a very early effort of Doyle's called "The Haunted Grange of Goresthorpe," was not printed at all until 2000 when the Rodens Moriarty-like crew of agents tracked it down in the dusty files of *Blackwood's Magazine* where an editor at the time, deciding it wasn't worth printing, had stashed and forgotten it.

The stories vary widely in regard to their success, but there isn't one of them that isn't interesting if one likes Doyle. Most all of them are highly entertaining, and the best ones are genuine delights.

Some of the stories are additionally fascinating for historical reasons. Fantasy doesn't really contain dates so far as its basic notion is concerned, since the Faery world does, or does not exist just as much now as it did, or didn't during the last turn of the century. A science fiction yarn can get into dreadful trouble when the march of progress provides information which flatly invalidates essential points present in a tale, and it must be *very* well crafted to survive the test of time. Doyle proves in several of these stories that he's up to the task. "The Horror of the Heights", for example, is a story about dreadful things you might encounter at towering altitudes if you flew as high as a stratocruiser (as they used to call them). Now that we all routinely fly that high, and considerably higher, and all know there are no such dreadful things up there, it would seem Doyle's stratospheric bogies would no longer scare you. When I came across "The Horror" many years ago however, I was fascinated to find he pulled it off, and that some still do'

Another aspect of this collection which I find to be of great fun, is to have available in one book, different attempts by Doyle to play with the same theme. "The Ring of Thoth," and "Lot. No. 249" both explore the notion of mummies and ancient Egyptian magic, while "John Barrington Cowles" (this one clearly inspired Arthur Machen) and "The Parasite," which I think are two of the strongest and genuinely alarming stories in the book, investigate some of the more sinister possibilites of Mesmerism.

Using the typically excellent introduction by the Rodens as a guide, it's fascinating to see what Doyle did with his autobiographical material. He put in a stretch as a ship's doctor, for example, and we see in this book how he made marvelous use of it in numerous ways. "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'" uses these experiences, particularly those which took place in frozen regions, marvelously and "J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement" employs it to back up Doyle's exploration of the famous mystery of the Marie Celeste and which, as Dirdin points out, swims in the sort of deep waters Melville liked to explore.

Many of the works are just unabashed wild and woolly fun. "The Bully of Brocas Court, A legend of the Ring" is a grand story about a formidable fighting phantom who delights in pulverizing passing boxers. The nicest touch is a surprising little white spook which makes the spectral bully cower in fear. I hope that somebody, some day, makes a ridiculous movie using the "The Great Keinplatz Experiment" as its basic inspiration.

Taking mercy on those who simply can't do without their Holmes–I confess I am not one who can—the Rodens have happily deemed "The Legend of the Hound of the Baskervilles," and "The Speckled Band" to be sufficiently weird, and permitted their inclusion into this collection.

That leaves no less than twenty six other weird stories by this old master for you to read, including ones involving the gruesome destruction of a horribly pale pirate captain with filmy eyes in "The Blighting of Sharky," the hideous survival of a cavern monster from the past in "The Terror of Blue John Gap," and the dangers of fooling around with gigantic meat-eating plants out West in "The American's Tale."

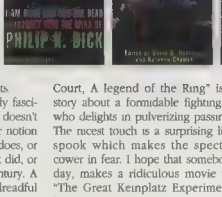
Great fun all around.

What lured me into reading fantasy as a creepy kid were the wonderfully gaudy covers of the science fiction magazines clipped to the outsides of newsstands, and marched along the racks lining the dark and smoky walls of cigar stores in huge, colorful clusters.

The burly astronauts and busty astronettes ducking deadly rays zapped in their direction by bug-eyed aliens from glistening, highly improbable rocket ships printed in bright inks on those covers called to me strongly. Again and again, I found myself handing over money for those magazines instead of the candy and malteds I'd saved it for.

Mostly, I have to confess, I found that the bulk of the stories in those magazines could'nt fulfill the promise of their covers. I discovered that the simplified science in them gave me an unexpected advantage over the grownups who were then fascinated by the space era dawning all around them, but who hadn't a clue as to the basic details of the staggering technology which made it possible for us Americans to whiz huge rockets containing monkeys, people and explosives round and round the planet. It gave me huge satisfaction to see their eyes bug-out and their jaws drop as I rattled off the fantastic speeds required to reach orbital, and then escape velocity.

But in the end science fiction's gung ho rocketeers and nerdy labsters paled on me and, except for a very few rare exceptions, I found myself drifting off into the sort of stuff you find within this magazine.



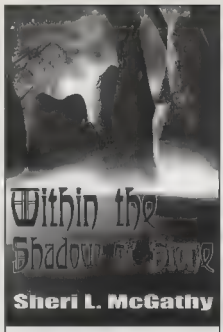
I Am Alive and You Are Dead; A Journey into the Mind of Phillip K. Dick by Emmanuel Carrere (Metropolitan Books/ Henry Holt, New York, Hardcover, 315 pp., $26.00), is about one of those exceptions, probably the most exceptional, Phillip K. Dick. It's written by Emmanual Carrere, and I should warn you that as a reader and possibly a writer of fantasy, you might find its remarkable astuteness at peering into a mind which enjoys playing around with bizarre and dangerous notions, and exploring the dangers of that game more than a little brilliantly, very bothersome.

It is highly likely that reading it will give you the creeps. It certainly has given me the creeps.

There is an astounding amount of research packed with inside stories about Dick, his loved ones, and other associates be they drugged out of their skulls or sober, functioning brilliantly to being totally at a loss, the book rises and falls dizzyingly from the extraordinarily funny, to the touching, to the pathetic, to the agonizingly tragic.

The subtitle is no exaggeration: Carrere is trying his best to get into the mind of Phillip K. Dick, and for long passages I suspect he's actually done it. The effect on the reader, this reader, at least, varied from heart warming, amusing, and alarming, to downright devastating.

A unique look at a very unique man and



Ebook: ISBN 1-55404-110-4
Paperback: ISBN 1-55404-095-7

WITHIN THE SHADOW OF STONE

...a journey through legend and myth to the time of the ancient standing stones—to a world where warriors are bound to the stone and the Shroud Born walks within the mist.

~ When your need is truly great, the stone shall not forsake. ~

"This magical tale takes a unique twist on the myths surrounding the standing stones."
~ Tina Morgan, Fiction Factor

Available from
Double Dragon Publishing
http://www.double-dragon-ebooks.com

Special order through Ingram, or online at www.Amazon.com, www.Barnesandnoble.com, www.Borders.com, or www.BAMM.com

this could also be a chance to take a few meaningful looks at yourself.

With ***The Bloody Crown of Conan,*** by Robert E. Howard (Del Rey/Random House, New York, Paperback, 366 pp., $15.95), someone has finally gotten around to printing trade paperback versions of the skillfully and lovingly produced series of Robert E. Howard collections. The collections are illustrated with gusto, and seemingly deep understanding by Gary Gianni. The black and whites are identical with the original edition, the full page paintings are now also black and white, but it makes it possible for those with smaller budgets to get their hands on these excellent books.

This collection is led off with an informative introduction by longtime Howard student Rusty Burke, which contains some particularly neat quotes, and I would like to pass on the following selections for your pleasure and edification:

"He (Howard) was greater than any profit making policy that he could adopt." H.P. Lovecraft

"His fictional Sword and Sorcery heroes and foes would seem to be more naturally chanted or sung about than portrayed in paragraphs." Steve Eng

"Conan, the Existentialist." Charles Hoffman

The illustrations by Gianni are, as usual, perfect for the stories and will add to them wonderfully if the reader is wise and pauses long enough to consider them, let them sink in, and let them expand his or her understanding of the text. Please do give them time to work their magic.

In these stories Conan is older, tougher, and downright scarier than in the previous anthology. I'm willing to state flatly that I think these are the best and most convincing depictions of the savage fellow I've ever come across.

It seems to me that Gianni has gotten even better at adding atmospheric touches, making his villains more villainous, his monsters more monstrous, and his women more womanly. It is classic work.

On top of all that, you've got wonderful stories such as "The People of the Black Circle," and "A Witch Shall Be Born" printed for the first time from Howard's own manuscripts, along with a fascinating collection of outlines and notes.

Year's Best Fantasy 4, edited by David G. Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer (EOS/HarperCollins, New York, Paperback, 484 pp., $7.99), is not only one of the very best series of annual anthologies put out, it is also one of the coziest, and most friendly.

The general introduction by the editors sets the tone. It's full of little frets about what's happening in the field, it hands out many kindly plugs to what others might regard as competitors, it gives helpful information all around and tries to look on the bright side of the business as much as possible.

It's the little intros they give to each and every story however, that I always find particularly heartwarming. They're always careful to say something nice about the author and attempt to make a truly illuminating comment or two, which shows they've given the work some serious thought. Very often they'll pass on some interesting piece of gossip and—I love it—they often give you the author's Website address.

I find their whole approach entirely charming and approve of it thoroughly.

The stories are always interesting and they pack in a lot of them. This fat little paperback has no less than 484 pages with tiny type and narrow margins, so there's no possibility of trying to just gloss over the book's excellent contents. I'll mention a few of the standouts with the understanding many excellent works have been left out due to editorial constraints.

The brilliant Gene Wolfe has a wonderfully complex fantasy/reality fable called "Of Soil and Climate" concerning transformational magic, and involving a person who is both a psychiatrist in prison (talk about images to chew over!) working as a trustee doctor, *and* a wonderful variant of a Robert E. Howard style "adventurous wanderer" in a fantasy world which continually morphs on all levels. An ordinary author would need to write perhaps five or six novels in a New York Times best selling fantasy series in order to get across what Wolf conveys in only 26 pages. An astounding performance.

Neil Gaiman's "Closing Time" is a sly variation on the classic "chaps-at-the-club-swapping-stories" tale favored by Dunsany and the like. His first joke is to do a very good job of making the "club" much rattier than the upscale sort of locale usually presented, he then goes on to pull clever twists on the telling of the very subtly nasty story. Told from mouth to mouth and finishing with a highly effective twist, you may be compelled to check the darker corners of your room. The bit of gossip in the story's intro certainly interested me, as Gaiman has apparently written a script for a movie called MIRROR MASK which has been directed by Dave McKean, and is slated for release this year. I, for one, am very curious to see how it all turns out.

I'll wrap up by pointing out that you should not miss two marvelous tales in this book involving magical animals: Kelly Link's "Catskin," and Tanith Lee's "Moonblind," as they are both extraordinarily strange and beautiful at the same time.

Gahan Wilson

Iron Council, China Miéville, Del Rey, New York, hardcover, 496 pp., $24.95, ISBN 0-345-46402-8

China Miéville has a history of surpassing himself. His first novel, *King Rat,* established him as a promising young writer, but no more than that. His second novel, *Perdido Street*

Details

of

Beauty,

Color

and

Action...

"I've gotten to the point where I collect only the best...in color and detail. I found them here. They seem to jump to life with all their grace and movement!" - Britt Olson
(dragon collector)

Window of Wonders

$60.00
Free Shipping

DRAGONSITE

Dragons for the Serious Dragon Collector.

Three Ways to Order Window of Wonders and many more:

www.thedragonsite.com

800.922.7716

1220 Waterville-Monclova Rd.
Waterville, Ohio 43566

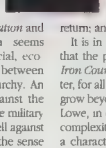
"Let these little fairies brighten your mornings."

Vibrant, full color artwork on a quality 11oz. coffee mug.

To view or to order please visit us online at: http://www.precrousorigms.com/mugs.html

Station, was a tour de force of style and imagination that vaulted him into the forefront of contemporary fantasists. And his next book, *The Scar*, was even better, an artistic leap forward on every level—the *Moby Dick* of the New Weird.

Now comes *Iron Council*, not a bad book by any means, but a disappointing one the first of Miéville's novels that does not substantially improve upon its predecessors. *Iron Council* bears the marks of having been rushed into print. It feels unfinished, sketched out but not fully fleshed out, lacking the delirious multiplicity that Miéville brings to his best work.



Iron Council is set in and around Miéville's signature city of New Crobuzon; the plot swings around the city in space and time like an asteroid orbiting the sun, drawing far away only to return to plunge like a dagger into its heart. The time is some twenty years after the events of *Perdido Street Station* and *The Scar*, and New Crobuzon seems unchanged—that is to say, its social, economic, and political order teeters between totalitarian repression and total anarchy. An ill-considered war undertaken against the country of Tesh, an opponent whose military and magical might is beginning to tell against the New Crobuzon forces, adds to the sense of a city on the ropes, teetering on the verge of explosion and cataclysmic change.

Years ago, a mad entrepreneur conceived the idea of connecting New Crobuzon with a distant coast by means of a railway running through jungle, mountains, and zones of existential chaos where reality is as mutable as weather. A powerful train, surrounded by hundreds of workers and security guards—like a mobile microcosm of New Crobuzon—progressed slowly down the track as it was laid, moving farther and farther from the source of supplies and authority. Finally, fed up with dangerous conditions, the workers went on strike and, when management responded with violence, seized control of the train. Calling themselves the Iron Council, they disappeared into uncharted wilderness, pulling up old track behind them and laying it down before them as they went.

Years later, as revolution bubbles below New Crobuzon's rancid surface, this isolated example of successful rebellion shines like a beacon to the city's downtrodden masses of humans, nonhumans, and Remade. The truth of the story is irrelevant; what counts is the legend of the stolen train roaming triumphant and free, perhaps even one day to return. Nor has the government of New Crobuzon forgotten the Iron Council. They have spent years tracking down the pirates. Now, at last, they have found them, and, paradoxically, the only possible escape route lies back in the direction of the city. When news of the Iron Council's imminent return reaches New Crobuzon, it triggers an uprising. Soon the city is engulfed in civil war. Meanwhile, as the Iron Council speeds on, heading straight for the thick of the fighting, all sides wait for it to arrive, knowing that when it does, nothing will be the same again.

Miéville's novels have always been politically engaged, but *Iron Council* is his most overtly political yet, and much of the book is devoted to an examination of the tangled motivations that lie at the heart of revolutionary movements and in the hearts of the revolutionaries who make up such movements. Three characters are the focus here: Ori, a disaffected young man in New Crobuzon, drawn to the violence of revolution; Cutter, a man driven to rebellion by unrequited love for the charismatic, almost saintly (and hence somewhat inhuman) figure of Judah Lowe, a master of golem magic and a member of the Iron Council who has returned to New Crobuzon to prepare for the train's return; and Lowe himself.

It is in the nexus of these three characters that the promise and also the limitations of *Iron Council* are starkly evident. On and Cutter, for all their centrality, never come alive or grow beyond their functions in the plot. Judah Lowe, in contrast, is presented with as much complexity as Miéville has ever lavished upon a character, and the resulting portrait of a gifted and tortured individual mysteriously impelled to become a better man than he knows himself to be, until ultimately his goodness reaches such a rarefied level that it loses touch with its human roots, is brilliant. One section of the novel, "The Perpetual Train," an extended flashback detailing Lowe's spiritual and magical evolution, constitutes a short novel in itself and is one of the best things Miéville has written to date. The evocation therein of Lowe (who shares the name of the historical rabbi of Prague credited by legend with creating a golem) is painstaking and absorbing. The story related—of the events leading up to the establishment of the Iron Council—is utterly compelling, a rip-roaring Wild West adventure that is also a moving romance and an acute psychological study. And the magical art of golem-making is elaborated with all the exuberant inventiveness and intelligence that readers have come to expect from Miéville.

So rich is this one section that the rest of the novel often seems perfunctory by comparison. As *Iron Council* barrels toward its climax, plot holes loom ever larger, subplots fail to cohere, characters are cast aside. Did Miéville's interest or powers wane, or did deadline pressures intervene? I suspect the latter. None of this is to imply that *Iron Council*, for all its frustrations and missed opportunities, is not an engrossing read. It is. But it could have been so much more. And readers have every right to expect more from this exceptionally gifted author. ❧

Paul Witcover

FABLE
Blood
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Violence
It's good to play together.

By Gregory Frost with Helen Pilinovsky

Storytellers, artists, and academics take part in the conference with a thousand faces.

"People used to begin the day with a song to welcome the sun," says Michael Meade as he drums a rhythm appropriate to such a song. "Songs … were aimed at something, they aimed the breath of life in a certain direction—to sing to the ancestors, to sing to the spirit of change, to sing to the Earth." He then proceeds to lead a standing-room-only audience in a morning chant to the Earth, a West African song with the recurring refrain of *'Ab-zeema-ava,'* which he says translates approximately as "Praise to the Earth." It sounds kind of "Kumbaya" but somehow manages not to fall into that campfire horror-experience. Instead, it refreshes and invigorates, and prepares us for Meade's talk on "The World Behind the World."

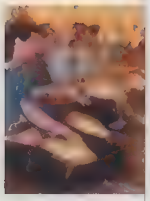
It's an old notion, he explains, that all the things in this world begin in the other world, the one hidden behind this one, the world of mystery and imagination, which sustains this world. "Dreams," he tells us, "are the delivery system of the other world to this world. If you don't dream … you die." And each one of us is wrapped in a mystery that is only solved as it's lived out. It's a theme that will reappear throughout the weekend again and again.

So begins my first day at the Mythic Journeys Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The conference, the first of its kind, took place June 2–6, 2004.

While I'm pondering the transmission of life from the dream world to the seen world, my colleague Helen Pilinovsky is engaging with a panel of academics—professor and poet Ari Berk, Professor of Anthropology and Folklore Alan Dundes, Professor Emeritus William Doty, author and Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor Wendy Doniger—on the topic of "Metamorphosis." Doty, begins by explaining that every single telling or retelling of a story is a metamorphosis, and that the surface of the tale can be changed again and again, as Levi-Strauss said, without destroying the structure.

As a fantasy writer who has of late been working with fairy and folk tales (in my novel *Fitcher's Brides* and short story "Tengu Mountain," published in *The Faery Reel*), I immediately think of the dozens of Little Red Riding Hood variants or the cross-cultural Cinderellas who appeared in ancient Egypt and China as well as in the stories of 18th-century France and in the Grimm Brothers' *kinder und hausmarchen*. Indeed, the shell may change but the truth of the story remains. Or, as Robert Bly says in another of the panels, A myth is a story that doesn't look true on the outside but is true on the inside."

Professor Doniger explains that myths are stories that work on two levels, which is why they change and why what they change is significant. She ties references to Levi-Strauss with the comment that the reason why myths keep changing is that they're never gotten right. Myths cannot be solved. They are paradoxes with no right answers. "Myths choose subtext." She disputes Jungian archetypes (which are trotted out in many of the panels, for many of the panelists are themselves Jungians), saying that they



ABOVE: A troupe of American and African drummers explore themes of rhythm and community. RIGHT: A portrait of Little Red Riding Hood by Terri Windling.

By The Sword, Inc.

Quality Reproductions

By The Sword, Inc. is one of the largest Medieval - Renaissance dealers in the US carrying 1000's of exciting products. You can be safe and assured ordering from our established firm. Our warehouse facilities allow our customers fast delivery on their orders!

We've supplied major motion pictures, theme parks, Renaissance weddings, theatrical plays, re-enactment groups and of course home decorators and collectors. We are recommended and

24hrs, 7 days a week!

Questions: 888-244-3263

Mon - Fri. 9:00am-5:00pm est.

By The Sword, Inc.
P.O. Box 07282
Ft. Myers, FL 33919

http://www.bytheswordinc.com

are static and so don't bend or blend with the transformative story. What she prefers to focus on in her work on myths is the notion of deception, the masquerade; and what is regarded as change is often revelation. She cites the kitsune—the fox woman—whose apparent metamorphosis can be seen as an allegory of finding out who you were all along.

Dundes defines myths as sacred narratives of the creation of the world, legends as stories of the world (postcreation), and folktales as fictional stories not possessed of timelines. Doniger responds that myths (and she includes folktales) are stories that have meaning over time and space and many versions, and that they can be told in different ways which threads back to the earlier Levi Strauss quote. The discussions themselves are cyclical, looping back, coming around again with new information, transforming as they flow. This is a really good time.

A few hours later, I find myself similarly empaneled in such august company as Karen Joy Fowler, Terri Windling, Carolyn Dunn, Midori Snyder, Delia Sherman, and Ellen Kushner to discuss "Crossing Borders in Myth and Art," where the notion of borders as loci within fiction is complemented by comments on the act of writing itself by Karen Fowler, who notes: "One of the most effective ways to subvert expectations is to … bring in rules from another form." Poet Carolyn Dunn takes the notion of border to another level by explaining that her mixed American Indian blood has her forever living in a borderland of sorts, making border crossings as a native woman because of the intertwining effects of both heritage and upbringing.

Borders are considered to be the more fertile and interesting places in fiction. Holly Black's YA novel *Tithe* is used as an example. Its teenage protagonist, who is both human and not human, lives in the grungy contemporary world of New Jersey but is pulled toward the unseen faery world that holds sway over her. She is a character caught up in the tension of the border.

The discussion advances into consideration of other liminal works of fiction—works that borrow elements from more than one genre or form and thereby create an interstitial tale that can belong to multiple categories or none at all.

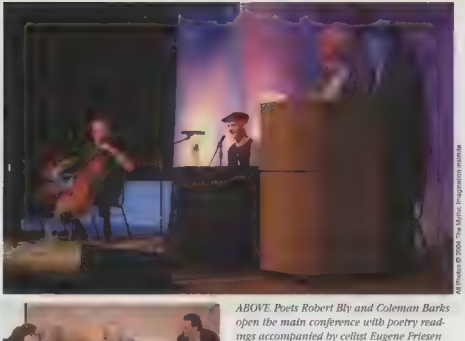
Puppeteer and actor William Todd-Jones comments from the audience that he *lives* this type of story because of his use of puppetry in storytelling. It's theater, it's acting, but it requires expertise that transcends typical theater. He notes also that his ethnic designation "Welsh" anchors him in the borderland. "Welsh" being a Saxon word that translates as "alien."

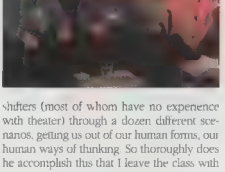
A day later, I find out just *how* alien as I evolve into a snake, an ape, a tree, and finally a predatory lion stalking a herd of gazelles gathered around a watering hole while Todd-Jones looks on. He leads his class of shape-shifters (most of whom have no experience with theater) through a dozen different scenarios, getting us out of our human forms, our human ways of thinking. So thoroughly does he accomplish this that I leave the class with rug burns on my toes from stalking and chasing my prey—something that real lions probably don't have to contend with.

A few hours later, I pass Todd-Jones in the hall. He has transformed into an eight-foot-tall satyr, complete with fur, hooves, and horns.

This is just not your usual conference. It is, in fact, unique in my experience.

In many ways, the first Mythic Journeys Conference was a celebration of the spirit and work of the late Joseph Campbell on the centennial anniversary of his birth. Michael Karlin, president of the Mythic Imagination Institute who co-chaired the conference with creative director Honorah Foah, explained, "I felt that if more people knew about the work of Joseph Campbell and his colleagues, the world would be a more tolerant, compassionate, creative, and passionate place. I knew that I had to do something to carry this message to a broader audience." And, indeed, many of the panel topics featured Campbell's theories.





All Photos © 2006 The Mythic Imagination Institute

ABOVE: Poets Robert Bly and Coleman Barks open the main conference with poetry readings accompanied by cellist Eugene Friesen and percussion player Arto Tunchboyacyan. LEFT: Dr Wendy Doniger, Dr James Hillman, Dr Huston Smith and author Phil Cousineau converse with one and other. BELOW LEFT: Dr Ari Berk, artist Alan Lee, and Dr Verlyn Flieger engaged in discussion.

One, "A Curious Understanding of Myth and Joseph Campbell," folded two scheduled panels together, led by the aforementioned Alan Dundes and Robert Segal. Segal, a professor of Theories of Religion, placed Campbell into a larger framework—a "hierarchy of the theory of myth." While many see myth as part of something larger—society, culture, the mind, religion—Segal perceived Campbell as someone who subsumed such categories into myth. In effect, he was an evangelist for myth. Segal further divided approaches to the subject of myth into 19th-and 20th-century variants. The 19th century approach perceived myth as a primitive counterpart to science, while the 20th-century approach insisted that moderns need to have myth, too. Campbell fit comfortably into this latter approach. He didn't give up science, which meant that he could embrace Jungian theory and could psychologize the hero's journey.

Dundes admitted that his own approach was almost diametrically opposed to Campbell's, explaining that the notion of "the universality of myth" is itself a myth. Campbell, he said, "is almost completely ignored by academic folklorists." By Dundes' definition, myth could be defined as a specific genre of folk narrative, distinguished by being orally transmitted and by focusing specifically on explaining how the world came to be in its present state. Myth, in popular use, is analogous to falsehood, whereas it's supposed to represent an ultimate truth. Dundes also

Give the gift of mystery and magic this holiday season!

rejected the 20th century approach by saying, "There are no new myths." New folktales and legends could certainly be created, but not myths. For him, Campbell used the term "myth" when he was in fact talking about folk tales, but he freely admits that most people do not recognize the distinctions and throw the words about as though they all mean the same thing. Even Levi Strauss, he said, confused the two when writing about Oedipus. Finally, Dundes rejected Campbell's "universalist" claims regarding myth. "It has long been a popular fantasy that all people share the same stones," he explained. But in fact this had not proven to be the case. While many cultures might share a certain fairy tale (see earlier comments on "Cinderella"), there is no fairy tale with global distribution. And so in one event we had both a Campbellian approach to myth and strong, even reactionary, opposition to that approach.

I found it to the conference's credit—and exemplary of precisely the sort of tolerance and sharing that Michael Karlin had expressed as a goal—that while celebrating Campbell's work, the participants remained open to opposing views and approaches. Nobody owns myth, after all, and as this example reveals, the precise meaning and interpretation of myth's qualities varied from panel to panel, topic to topic, discipline to discipline. Many of the panels—as you can see from the earlier examples given—did not even reference Campbell, instead using the subjects of myth and storytelling as springboards into intense dialogue on how we each relate to myths and tales, how we can bring them into our lives, and how we can recognize that our lives are stories, too, that we inevitably move along with our own story arc that most of the time we don't recognize.

We are story.

The conference kicked off with a festive event, "Ancient Spirit, Modern Voice," at the DeFoor Centre in Atlanta, where the immutable Charles Vess and Karen Shaffer curated a remarkable exhibit. It drew from, as Charles explained, "the best illustrators, painters, photographers—even greeting card artists in one case." On display were paintings and sketches by Vess, Alan Lee, Meinrad Craighead, Helena Nelson-Reed, Lorenzo Scott, Brian Froud, Virginia Lee, and a dozen more; collage pieces by Terri Windling, who's better known for her writing and editing work (and so coming upon her work was akin to discovering treasure); Huichol and Tepehuano yarn art from the Sierra Madre Mountains; Australian aboriginal "Awelye" paintings; sculptures by Wendy Froud and Roxanne Swentzell, and photography by Viggo Mortensen and Stu Jenks. Jenks' installation was particularly affecting: a darkened chamber with whirls of light and alfalfa spun around the edges of the floor, throwing illumination on awesome, eerie photos. One of Jenks' works became the iconic image for the convention—an ascending and widening gyre of flame emerging

TOP: Artist Charles Vess(left), and Brian Froud(right) pose with William Todd-Jones(center). ABOVE: With the aid of a dulcimer and a baritone flute, Ulla Suokka interprets the Scandinavian myths of the Kalevala.

from the center of a spiral earthwork. When Helen interviewed him, Jenks commented, "We're making the unseen seen. They [the attending writers] use verbal metaphors mostly, and I use visual metaphors." Transformation was clearly one of the themes running through the work on display—but also art that walked the edgy borders of form and medium, art that reflected a multicultural diversity of expression, yet all curiously and collectively touching upon the mythic and the transcendent. As Charles Vess said, this was indeed an extraordinary coming together—what Jenks called "a balance between the heart and the head."

Mornings at the conference began with "Wake Up" events, from which you could select dream shaming, yoga, movement exercises, and "ecstatic" dancing. Any one of these events proved refreshing and invigorating as preparation for a day of rethinking the world. That sounds a bit pompous even as I look at it on the page, but it really was what was going on here. The panels throughout the day were offering dozens of different pathways to approach reconnecting—to the earth, to each other, to notions of peace and sharing. One did not have to be a blind devotee of Campbell's philosophy to come away with a recharged battery or fresh ideas. Honora Foah expressed it like this: "I fear that people capable of imagination and empathy are being outpaced by the bong. I hope [we] can be one of the many voices raised in the service of mercy and justice, and beauty, just gratuitous beauty." This was the anti-assimilation convention.

Other panels throughout the weekend took on the topics of apocalypse and animal transformation, stories of descent and return from the Underworld, C.S. Lewis, female warrior figures, gnostic traditions, grief as ritual, Joseph Campbell's journals, and even "the Krispy Kreme Story." If the latter sounds absurdly like a Frank Capra film that should have starred Jimmy Stewart, it had a place here, for the Krispy Kreme Foundation was one of the main supporters of the conference. Its president and CEO, Scott Livengood, explained that the foundation "promotes stories and storytelling ... in helping people achieve their potential and enrich their lives." Mr. Livengood also sat on the board of directors of the conference, helping to make it all possible. So, next time you're about to bite into one of those amazing doughnuts, remember that there's more going on than just flour, sugar, and a big hole.

Attending academics not previously mentioned included Coleman Barks, who has translated much of the work of Rumi; Jungian psychoanalyst Guy Corneau; James Hillman, C.W. "Chip" Sullivan III (who will be familiar to anyone who's attended an International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts); Faye Ringel; Bradd Shore, Huston Smith, Robert Walker, and Robert Bly. I'm leaving out dozens more—but if you know these names, you'll appreciate what a stellar cast it was.

Attending storytellers, writers, filmmakers and artists not mentioned elsewhere included Peter S. Beagle, Jane Yolen, Joyce Carol Oates, Charles de Lint, MaryAnn Harris, Brian Froud, Alan Lee, Guy Gavriel Kay, Phil Cousineau, Gayle Ross, and the remarkable Betty Sue Flowers. Again, I'm leaving out many names—and I haven't even gotten to the entertainment yet.

I mentioned at the start that Michael Meade used drumming as a way of drawing down tales and captivating his audience. And drumming figured in a number of other panels, too. One evening, conference participants were invited to experience drumming for themselves, as the Atlanta-based group, Drum Café, led an open-drumming concert. On every chair in the lecture hall, they placed a drum, and to sit was to take up the drum, hold it between your knees, and add your own rhythm to the collective percussion. They

MITCHELL GRAHAM'S

Fifth Ring Trilogy

0060506512 • $7.50/$10.00 Can.

The Fifth Ring

Book One of the astounding bestseller

"I loved this book"

Scifi Dimensions

0060506/5X • $7.99/$10.00 Can

The Emerald Cavern

Seeking refuge in a foreign land Mathew Lewin battles an unseen enemy and a creature that can't exist

"One of the best—most unique sagas–to come along in years"

Explorations

eos
An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers
www.mitchellgraham.net

Robert Jordan's
The Wheel of Time
The Heron Mark Sword
Authorized and approved by Robert Jordan, this sword is an accurate copy of the blade in The Wheel of Time™ series. This 42 inch sword has a blade hand-forged, of a very tough high carbon steel. The guard and pommel are of brass, and the balance is simply superb. An amazing example of the swordmaker's art. A matching scabbard is included. #500058...$275
This elegant 17 inch dagger of Padin Fain has a high carbon, fully tempered steel blade which is wickedly curved and has a reinforced tip that can punch through mail. The nickel silver guard has a encircling serpent, and the pommel is set with a simulated ruby. The grip is wood, wrapped with brass wire. Scabbard include #500250. .$140
Padan Fain's Dagger
A Division of ATLAN
Box 2640 RF-04 • Conover, NC 28613
www.museumreplicas.com

Realms of
Fantasy
The largest magazine in the world devoted to fantasy
Visit us at www.rofmagazine.com
Access Writers' Guidelines for submitting stories
Sign up for a new subscription
Renew a current subscription

proved fairly handily that everybody has built-in rhythm (you have a heartbeat, you have rhythm) and that drumming can release tension and lighten one's burden. Drum Café's co-director, Alan Eagles, explained that the group travels all over, bringing drumming to children's festivals, fringe festivals, and even into Fortune 500 company boardrooms.

Another evening, singer-songwriter (and sf and fantasy fan) Janis Ian performed a terrific concert, handily adapting her repertoire of songs and stories to the themes of the conference. Many of her songs—such as the riveting "On the Other Side," in which a firefighter who has died after performing an heroic rescue reflects upon his life and his duty, what he has given up, and what he has saved—already crackled with the material of the conference (as well as with that of our own current cultural dilemmas). Many other fine, if lesser known, musicians and performers—such as Derek Beres, Heather Dale, Susan Eldridge, Shelley Mitchell, and Cosy Sheridan—offered hours and hours of entertainment and reflection.

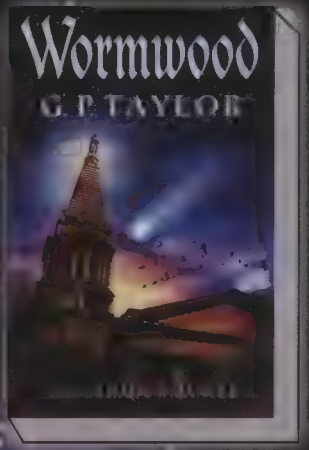
OK, you have the idea by now. This thing was huge. Epic, even. You're sorry you missed it. For you the news is good. Mythic Journeys is scheduled to return in 2006.

As you'd expect of any first-time conference, this one was learning the ropes. There were far too many programming tracks going on simultaneously for any one person—or even two people—to cover. Helen and I spent a lot of time scramb.ing between panels and events, trying to get at least a taste of what we could not savor in full. At one point we counted 27 competing tracks of programming. Part of this was due, I'm sure, to the conference organizers attempting to be all things to all attendees. Their desire for such inclusiveness was noble but overwhelming, and no matter how judiciously you chose, you would have been hard-pressed not to miss something you wanted to see.

The programming also finally proved somewhat schizoid, so that the many writers and artists on hand were relegated to programming tracks separate from the academic discussions, with almost no crossover. This was a shame in a way, because both sides—both aspects—were speaking about the same topics. In one room I could listen to four people discuss the notion of transformation as it applied to Jungian types, and then walk into another room and listen to four other people discuss transformation as an essential element of their fiction, of story-creation. It will be interesting to see if the 2006 conference committee can find ways to blend both faces. I think it would make for some dynamic conversation regarding a nature of, for example, archetypes and the way they are being used not only by practitioners of a particular school of psychology but also by modern conjurers of art and story. I hope to be there when that happens. The conference, after all, is called "Mythic Journeys" and this was but the first. ❧

New York Times #1 bestselling author

From the author of the **#1 bestseller, *Shadowmancer*,** comes his next epic adventure!



Master storyteller G. P. Taylor brings us another thrilling tale of good vs. evil, where fallen angels and dark spirits vie for allegiance during a time of treachery and deceit.

Praise for *Shadowmancer*!

"*Shadowmancer* has cast a spell on both sides of the Atlantic."
—*Entertainment Weekly*

"Surprises to keep readers madly turning the pages."—*Publishers Weekly*

Available wherever books are sold.

G. P. Putnam's Sons
A Member of Penguin Young Readers Group • www.penguin.com

By Emma Bull

Clothes can make the historical reenactor.

Some of you probably think I spend too much of this column's space on historic costume. (And I just heard others of you growl, "Not nearly enough!" Patience, my dears, we're getting there.) I have two reasons for returning regularly to the subject—besides the fact that it was the clothes that drew me to historical reenactment in the first place.

You can learn useful things about period clothing and its acquisition from reading an article, unlike skills you have to learn by seeing, hearing, or doing. I could describe, in agonizing detail, the steps for a country dance or a series of stage fencing passes. I couldn't really teach you to dance or fence, however.

But with the help of the wonderful photos and illustrations that *Realms of Fantasy* editors find for me each issue, I can be of some real use in helping you dress for your time travel adventure.

The other reason for this obsession with your clothes is that, well: historical reenactors are obsessed with their clothes. Yes, they also have a passionate, near-mad interest in pilgrim routes in Spain in the Middle Ages, or the work of female stone masons in the early Renaissance, or the perfect way to make biscuits over an open fire. But they pursue their passions dressed in clothing as carefully researched and accurate to their chosen period and character as they can make it.

What's more, they take notice of the clothes of those around them. No one has a greater appreciation for exquisitely reproduced historic detail in costume than reenactors. They give extra points to anyone who goes to the trouble to get it right. Strange as it may sound, period correct hose points ornamented with silver aiglettes or a bit of Elizabethan blackwork embroidery on a chemise might make the difference between seeing an observer at the RenFair and finding yourself backstage drinking homemade ale and advising the Queen on which fan to carry.

Shields held rim to rim, these reenactors play out a clash between Viking and Saxon forces. Photo: English Heritage

In a previous column, I offered suggestions for putting together a costume on a budget, one that will get you started in dressing the part. You may have learned how much more fun an event is when you're in costume. Now you want to get to the next level. You want to wear clothing and accessories so authentic you could almost pass for a native in the time period of your choice.

You'll need researching skills and that resolution to ask questions I often remind you of (good grief, you plan to dress up like a period-correct loon, and you're still shy? Get over that, right now!). You'll also need an array of crafting abilities, or an acquaintance with people who have them. You can buy authenticity—there are wonderful vendors of historically accurate clothing, shoes, leather gear, jewelry, armor, and uniforms—but it doesn't come cheap. Taking on some of the labor yourself will give you a costume faithful to the period without wrecking your budget.

Consider becoming a member of a costuming organization, like the Costumer's Guild West (www.costumersguildwest.org). You'll have an instant base of knowledgeable folk to share information (or grapes) with, and access to resources and special events you'll want to know about.

Past comes ALIVE in our SWORDS

www.mwart.com

Wide variety of fantasy and medieval [illegible] daggers, axes, armor, shields and much more

Yes, please send me FREE Medieval Weapon Art catalog

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY / STATE / ZIP

EMAIL

PHONE

send to Medieval Weapon Art SM
7926 W 103rd St Ste C Palos Hills IL 60465

US Requests Only!

Medieval Weapon Art SM
7926 W 103rd ST Ste C
Palos Hills IL 60465
www.mwart.com
tel. 800 355 8692

The Speed of Fashion

Fashion changed more slowly in the distant past—but not because the trend followers preferred it that way. Communication and transportation technology were fashion's ally long before there were newsstands. In the Middle Ages, printing was expensive and literacy was optional. But the rich still traveled, and brought home the demand for clothing silhouettes, details, and accessories from Italy, Spain, or even Constantinople. The rising merchant class copied the clothing of the wealthy, and the peasants borrowed as many fashionable touches for their clothes as they could afford.

Almost as soon as there were books and prints available in booksellers' stalls, there were fashion illustrations. Sometimes they were cartoons lampooning the extremes of trendiness. I recall a woodcut of an Italian lady with foot-high wooden pattens on her feet, with a servant holding onto each hand to keep her from falling over. But many book illustrations of the time document contemporary costume. A book sold in Venice might find its way to a scholar in London, and bring him, with Boccaccio's verses, a notion of how Italians were wearing their cloaks.

Printing became faster and cheaper, and conveyed more fashion information to more people. Periodicals contained fashion plates, tinted illustrations of new designs, and both gentlemen and ladies dashed to tailor or dressmaker to have them copied. Tailors and dressmakers, able to impress a larger audience with their work, became innovators—they began to create fashion rather than just following the demands of their wealthiest patrons. Fashion was no longer dictated by the needs of the king's figure, now the king needed to modify his figure to fit into fashionable clothes. Can revolution and democracy be far behind?

What printing failed to convey, the original fashion doll filled in. Early fashion designers dressed beautiful dolls in miniature versions of their latest gowns, hats, and other fripperies and shipped them to customers and seamstresses. Not even cannon and blockades could stop the spread of fashion. During the Napoleonic Wars French fashion dolls were smuggled in the same boats as kegs of illegal brandy to a style-hungry British population.

The technology of fashion itself evolved rapidly to meet the demands of changing silhouettes. Medieval robes could be fitted by lacing or belting, and needed very little complex pattern drafting. Even the clothing of the wealthy could be made by servants in the household. But the Renaissance and Tudor bodices and doublets, with their close-to-the-body fit, required shaped armholes and curving pattern pieces, in addition to skilled craftspeople. When the upside-down cone shape of the Elizabethan corset was replaced by a more complex ideal body form, pattern makers increased the number of seams in garments, curved them, invented darts both straight and curved—in short, the technology of turning a flat piece of fabric into a three-dimensional object became a matter for serious study.

Queen Elizabeth from the New York Renaissance Faire. Photo: D. Blake

The clothing industry developed specialized trades very early: designers, pattern drafters, cutters, fitters, sewers, pressers, and embellishers were all at work in a successful tailor's establishment, and before they started a garment, the complex hierarchy of textile workers produced their raw materials.

Photography didn't become a tool of the fashion industry until long after it was possible to use it. The Victorians, the Edwardians, the fashion fiends of the Twenties and Thirties, got most or all of their style updates from drawings reproduced in periodicals and catalogs. Drawings could idealize the look of a jacket or a ballgown. I don't suppose Victorian ladies had any better luck looking exactly like the lovely creatures in their fashion plates than modern women have looking like the models in *Vogue*.

The earlier your costuming era, the less exact documentation we've got for it, and the more freedom you have to imagine the variations in clothing worn by citizens of the day. But your freedom is limited by the fashion technology available at the time. For any era, as long as you don't play fast and loose with the silhouette, the pattern making and fitting conventions, or the materials, you can design your clothing just as the designers of the time did: to flatter the wearer and display the creativity of the maker.

Costume Reference Sources

If you want facts you can count on, go to the source—and in the case of costume, that's the clothing itself. Costume museums all over the world preserve and display original garments and accessories from a staggering range of centuries. You'll find the best collections of garments you're interested in in museums at the locations most associated with that period in history. Some museums with costume collections choose a narrow focus: a single century, or a few kinds of garments, say.

But other collections try to represent a range of costume from many eras and continents. You'll find beautiful suits of armor and displays of Medieval weaponry at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, for instance, and samples of 18th-century textiles in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. So if you're traveling for business or pleasure—especially to a historical recreation event!—look up museums in the area and see if they have costumes on exhibit.

Of course, not everything in a museum's collection is on exhibit all the time. Ask museum docents and staff about the period and garments you're most interested in. They may have brochures describing items not on display, or illustrated catalogs from previous exhibitions.

If you're very, very lucky, they may even offer you a closer look at some of the items. I was in the costume museum in Duggald, Manitoba (a small but excellent museum specializing in the clothing of the people who settled the province), and spotted a man's frock coat from the late 1800s. I was trying to sew a coat just like it, and was struggling over a baffling set of instructions for how to make the back vent. As I was craning my neck to see as much as I could of the coat's back side, a docent arrived and asked if she could answer any questions. I told her my problem.

Her face lit up. She took me to the museum's curator, whose face also lit up. The curator took me into the storage area where hundreds of antique garments lay boxed in acid-free tissue (read, costumer's Valhalla), pulled one down, and let me examine the back vent of the frock coat inside. I'd never touched a hundred-year-old garment before.

Admittedly, it was a small museum, and a slow day, and that sort of thing just doesn't happen very often. But if you come to a museum after doing a bit of research, and ask a question that calls on the enormous store of knowledge that costume historians have, you'll see that face-light-up phenomenon. Museum staffers are proud of their collections, and they know they're rarely appreciated by the casual tourist for the treasures they are. In many museums, you have the question they've waited all year to answer.

Costume museum road trips can be hard to come by, however. Thank goodness for the World Wide Web. Museums are making more of their collections accessible online every day, complete with photos and detailed descriptions of garments and, sometimes, virtual

Explore the Unknown...

SPIES AND LOVERS
Leigh Wyndfield
www.leighwyndfield.com

Free Federation solider Chilly Winthrop never anticipated that her first spy mission would reveal all her secrets to the one man from whom she's always hidden.

NEVER UNTIL TOMORROW
Eden Robins
www.newconceptspublishing.com

A soldier on a mission...
A researcher with a cause...
Together they could change history, or destroy the future.

4 ½ Stars! "A mesmerizing futunstic story." --CataRomance Reviews

THE HUNTRESS
Barbara Karmazin
www.liquidsilverbooks.com

Sonia and Rulagh fight chupacabras and forge a relationship that transcends species.

" a sizzling futunstic adventure story that kept me riveted to my PC ..." --CataRomance Reviews

OUT OF THE DARK
Barbara Karmazin
www.liquidsilverbooks.com

A terrorist bomb at O'Hare Space Port in 2065 separates half-Sidhe Cait O'Keefe from her husbands. Rescued by an albino Sidhe living in Chicago's abandoned tunnels, Cait faces a heartwrenching decision.

DESTINY'S SEDUCTION
Isabo Kelly
www.ltdbooks.com

To heal a magical rift that threatens time, a woman of prophecy and her first protector will be forced to face their destiny.

"A very fine fantasy novel . that totally engages the reader!" --The Best Reviews

GUARDIAN OF HONOR

Robin D. Owens
www.robindowens.com

Coming from LUNA Feb '05

A Colorado woman is Summoned to fight evil in another world. Now torn between her affinity for this realm and Earth, if given the chance to return home will she? Or dare she risk everything for a land not her own?

Find us in paperback or ebook online or at your local bookstore

tours. There are still a few unfortunate gaps in the knowledge contained on the Web, however. I couldn't find pieces from the collection of the Tower of London museum, possibly the most jaw-dropping repository of arms and armor on the planet. I've included a sidebar of links to some of the great museum costume and textile collections. You'll be bookmarking a few of these, trust me.

Your fellow costumers have gathered excellent collections of images of period clothing, in the form of drawings, cartoons, fashion plates, and old photos, and posted them on their Web sites. Sense and Sensibility Clothing (www.sensibility.com) offers a Vintage Images page that can't be beat, divided by era, and in addition to period images has photos of antique garments from private collections.

Mileux: the Costume Site (http://mileux.com/costume/) has links for every conceivable period and special interest. So does The Costumer's Manifesto (www.costumes.org), where you can not only follow research links but buy books and supplies. The Greater Bay Area Costumers' Guild site (www.gbacg.org) is packed with links, information, images, helpful contacts, and their invaluable pattern review pages, in which sewers provide candid evaluations of historic costume patterns they've used. Truly Victorian, makers of authentic women's clothing patterns from the Civil War era to the Gay '90s, has a valuable page of recommended reading and viewing

In this recreation of a 17th century military field camp, food is prepared under a canvas shelter. Photo: English Heritage

(http://trulyvictorian.netfirms.com/books.html) that covers far more than the company's Victorian-period specialty.

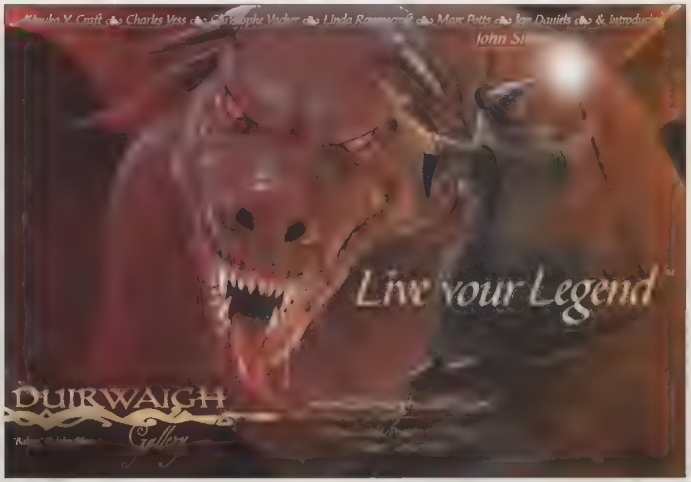
Paintings from your chosen period, especially portraits, can give you an excellent sense of the shapes, colors, and ornament that were fashionable in clothing at the time. It can be difficult to identify technical details like seams and closures from a painter's work, or make a guess as to the nature of the fabric. But for many eras, a good portrait is the only way to see how an item of clothing was worn, and with what.

If a painter isn't depicting his own time—say, if a Renaissance painter is painting a Biblical subject—the painting can't be trusted as an accurate representation of Biblical-era costume. It may be a good source of detail for the costuming at the time the work was painted, however. Before archaeology informed the average person's idea of the past, painters populated historical scenes with figures and ornaments from their present (a little like performing Shakespeare in modern dress). Many of the figures in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel decorations are in modified Italian Renaissance clothing. I remember spotting in an art history book a particularly nice slashed half sleeve, trimmed with little buttons or beads.

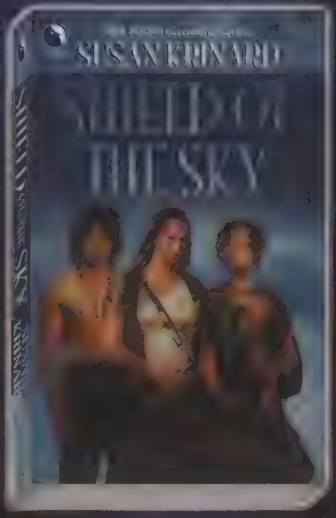
And of course, if you're dressing for the Victorian era or later, you have access to contemporary photographs. For colors, you'll still need those portraits and fashion plates, but there's nothing like being able to hold up a copy of an 1880s photo when someone asks, "Did they really wear collars like that?"

The Major Leagues: Military Costume

Military uniforms are both the easiest and the hardest historic costumes to get right. European soldiers in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance often didn't have what we'd call uniforms, although their armor and weapons were specific to the period, they were rarely required to dress alike, unless they were part



A world you can only imagine



From USA TODAY bestselling author

Susan Krinard

The bonds holding the Stone Gods are weakening...and all are in danger....

On sale now.

Mercedes Lackey,

the bestselling fantasy author of the *Heralds of Valdemar* series brings you

THE FAIRY GODMOTHER

Elena Kleda was supposed to be her kingdom's Cinderella until an accident of fate left her with a completely inappropriate prince! Determined not to remain with her stepfamily, Elena set out to get a new job as a Fairy Godmother!

Paperback on sale in November.

LUNA

Touch to play | LUNA Books • www.LUNA-Books.com

of a house guard. In later eras, some soldiers were expected to supply their own uniforms, and even officers' insignia of rank were sometimes bought from private merchants. This, as you can imagine, introduced some variations in clothes that by definition ought to be uni form.

But if there were regulations in dress, they were written down, from the Romans forward—bless military record-keeping! Military museums at forts and historic sites have actual uniform garments on display, and documents in their collections that specify the clothing for services, ranks, and duties, often right down to the buttons.

Buttons? Oh, yes. Military costuming is the only field in which you can expect someone to come up to you at an event and say, "Nice Buffalo Soldier uniform. Those are infantry buttons on that coat, though."

The place to start your research for authentic military costuming is with Osprey Books (www.ospreypublishing.com). Their slim but copiously illustrated publications on every era of military history, every army, every specialty within those armies, and every rank are good reading as well as good research. Costumers, military gamers, and miniature painters and collectors all swear by Osprey's line, so you'll find them for sale in toy and hobby stores as well as book stores and online.

Another useful site, selling Osprey and other military history books and treasures, is www.militaryfocus.com/index.htm. And for those of you who see yourselves as a gallant tar in someone's navy, take a look at Sea Room (www.sea-room.com/index.html). You'll find lots of nautical reference material, including all of Patrick O'Brian's novels—which are surprisingly good costume reference books considering they aren't illustrated.

Some of your best research aids are your fellow military reenactors. They can tell you where they found the fabric for their uniforms, how they researched their insignia, and where they bought hard-to-find hardware and accessories. They won't do all your work for you, but you can count on them to fill in the blanks when less personal channels fail. They want the company to look good, after all!

Consult the links at general costuming sites like Milieux and Costumer's Manifesto, as well. Both feature military costume research and resources.

Finding the Pieces

Once you know what you want to look like—soldier or civilian, you have to lay hands on the raw materials and construct your costume, or have someone else do it for you.

Two important resources for this are AlterYears (www.alteryears.com) and Amazon Dry Goods (www.amazondrygoods.com). AlterYears has a delightful retail store in South Pasadena, California, but neither company has an online catalog. At their Web sites, however, you can order their paper catalogs, and you should. The pictures and descriptions of goods and patterns are educational by themselves, and both are excellent sources of the patterns you'll find recommended in the Greater Bay Area Costumers' Guild reviews.

Finding period-correct fabric is tough in these days of textiles born in the chemistry lab. Renaissance velvet, for instance, was softer and less plush than our drapery, glassy rayon velvets. The 19th century's muslin was a fine, light, dressy cotton, not much like the utility fabric in the back corner of the modern fabric store. But you'll find lists of historical fabric sources on the links pages at Milieux and Costumer's Manifesto, including Reproduction Fabrics (www.reproductionfabrics.com). You'll also find sources for period buttons, ribbon, and other notions.

If you're already going to SCA tournaments or Renaissance Fairs or Cowboy Action Shooting events, you've probably noticed that there are vendors there who cater to participants. They sell everything from hats, shoes, cloaks, belt buckles, and masks to entire outfits. Don't worry if your costume isn't perfect its first time out. Visit the vendors for that ideal boot knife or pair of leather cavalry gauntlets, or trimmings for your hat. Most of those merchants have been involved for a long time in historical recreation of exactly the period you're interested in. They know what you need, and they're delighted to find it for you.

If you base your garment on a good, authentically designed pattern and choose materials as close as you can get to those available in the time period, you can begin to tell the story of your historical persona in your costume.

Beyond Authenticity: Character

Clothing is transformed by its wearer. A former Confederate soldier in a ratty blue coat with the insignia torn off may have taken that coat off a dead Union officer. A lady of doubtful morals may wear her skirt shorter, or narrower, than fashion dictates, or may show more of her bosom or arms. A lady who chooses to wear drab colors in a colorful era has a story to tell. So does a British Navy sailor who ornaments his dress uniform with a vivid Indian handkerchief, or a cowboy whose tobacco pouch is covered with Ojibwe quill-work.

The more you know about the character you imagine yourself to be during your travels in time, the more you can display that character to others in your costume. I once made myself an Italian Renaissance gown, though I knew I would be playing an Englishwoman at the local Renaissance Festival. As I sewed seams and placed trim, I began to construct her character as well. She'd married her way across most of Europe, each husband older and richer than the last, and had been

Historic Costume Collections on the Web

If you can't sample these museums' costume collections in person, check out these links for the next best thing.

The Museum of Costume
(www.museumofcostume.co.uk)
Located in Bath, the most fashionable

watering place in Regency-period England, they've got a splendid collection of men's and women's garments from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. But they don't stop there.

The Cavalcade of Costume Museum
(www.cavalcadeofcostume.co.uk/pages.php?page=home)

Louisiana State University Textile and Costume Museum
(http://130.39.239.204/textile/texdef.asp).

The Costume Museum of Canada
(www.costumemuseum.com)

The Bata Shoe Museum
(www.batashoemuseum.ca)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute
(www.metmuseum.org/collections/department.asp?dep=8)

The Smithsonian Institute
(www.si.edu) It's the jewel in the crown of American museums. Browsing the site could take as long as walking every floor of the affiliated buildings, but it's worth it: reproductions of paintings, vintage photos, pictures of items in the collections, and great virtual exhibits. For instance, visit "Within These Walls" (http://americanhistory.si.edu/house/home.asp), a virtual exhibit on the lives and times of five families and the house they lived in, from the Colonial period on.

The Victoria and Albert Museum fashion collection
(www.vam.ac.uk/exploring/collections/fashion). The V&A is arguably the greatest museum of the decorative arts in the world. And what's fashion but decoration for people?

widowed seven times. When the gown was done, I sewed seven short dangles of beads along the edge of the neckline, four on one side, three on the other. The largest bead in each dangle was a bone skull.

Someone finally made my day one afternoon by asking me about them. In memory of my past husbands, I said. Poor dears. Then I fingered the empty space where the eighth dangle would go and asked, "*You're* not a married man, are you?

Where Not to Research Period Costume

There are historic costume snares out there, laid for the unwary. Try to do as much of your own first-hand research as you can. Relying on the research of others—or even assuming they did some—can result in irritating setbacks in your quest for an authentic costume.

Film and TV are, for the most part, dangerous ground. There are exceptions. Emma Thompson and Ang Lee's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, or Ang Lee's Civil War movie, *Ride With the Devil*. But film and television costume designers are artists, not historians, and their job is often to create a mood at the expense of accuracy. The (sort of) recent *Elizabeth*, starring Cate Blanchett was luminous and gorgeous, but a historical befuddlement. Kevin Costner's *Open Range* may be the first western in which the guns sound right, but only one of many westerns in which the headgear looks wrong.

An excellent example of 17th century gentleman's wear, from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

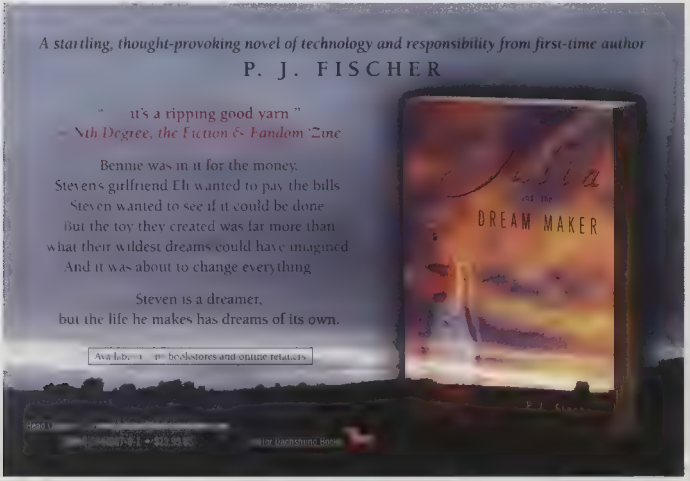
Even more confusing, some films get the costumes for one sex relatively right, while the costumes for the other are woefully inaccurate. I've seen dozens of 1950s movie and TV westerns in which the men looked pretty much like cowboys and townsmen, and the women looked like 1950s fashion models whose skirts were too long. Costumers love to recreate costumes from *Gone With the Wind*—but Vivien Leigh's gowns were made to make Leigh look good, not to make her look like a real Victorian lady.

Be cautious in using costume reference books with modern drawings. Some authors reinterpret original images from the period, such as portraits or illustrations, to make clothing lines and details easier to see. In the course of doing it, they may misinterpret what they're trying to reproduce. If you have any suspicion that the drawing you see might have been oversimplified, try to find a copy of the original piece of art, in the library or online. A little of that, and you'll know which authors you can trust.

Yes, it's a complex subject. But until you venture a little way into authentic costuming, you can't imagine how much fun, and how addictive, it can be. Your clothes will win you friends and influence people … most of all, you.

If you've got questions, ideas, or how-to tips on getting more involved in historic recreation, or want to let me know about history-related events that *Realms of Fantasy* readers would enjoy, please send mail to me, care of the magazine. Realms of Fantasy, 441 Carlisle Dr., Herndon, VA 20170, or e-mail me in care of the managing editor: lcleveland@sovhomestead.com.

Go live in the past!


A startling, thought-provoking novel of technology and responsibility from first-time author
P. J. FISCHER
" it's a ripping good yarn "
— Nth Degree, the Fiction & Fandom Zine
Bennie was in it for the money.
Steven's girlfriend Eli wanted to pay the bills.
Steven wanted to see if it could be done.
But the toy they created was far more than
what their wildest dreams could have imagined.
And it was about to change everything.
Steven is a dreamer,
but the life he makes has dreams of its own.
DREAM MAKER

EOS.. TRANSCEND THE ORDINARY

ABARAT
Days of Magic, Nights of War

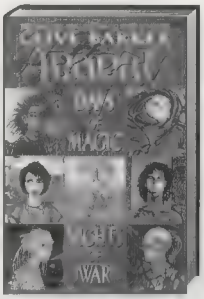
CLIVE BARKER

The second book in Clive Barker's epic *New York Times* bestselling series.

Hardcover
ISBN: 0-06-029170-2 • $24.99 ($34.99 Can.)

Also available from HarperAudio (Unabridged CD)
ISBN: 0-06-073589-9 • $39.95 ($56.95 Can.)

ON SALE SEPTEMBER 21ST



THE HIDDEN STARS
Book One of the Rune of Unmaking

MADELINE HOWARD

"A panoramic tale spun by a master storyteller. Howard has written a rich and assured novel of high fantasy and adventure." —Kate Elliott

Trade Paperback
ISBN: 0-06-057587-5 • $14.95 ($20.95 Can.)

ON SALE OCTOBER 12TH

THE SHADOW ROADS

Book Three of the Swans' War

SEAN RUSSELL

The eagerly anticipated, triumphant finale to the Swans' War trilogy, the breakout epic fantasy series by acclaimed author Sean Russell.

Hardcover
ISBN: 0-380-97491-6 • $25.95 ($36.95 Can.)

On Sale October 12th

THE LAST CONTINENT

TERRY PRATCHETT

"Hilarious . . . wickedly satirical . . . nothing short of brilliant." — *Publishers Weekly*

Mass Market Paperback
ISBN: 0-06-105907-2 • $6.99

On Sale October 26th

THE BURNING LAND

VICTORIA STRAUSS

"A deeply felt and richly imagined tale that explores issues of faith, destiny and the fallibility of human nature." — *Jacqueline Carey*

Mass Market Paperback
ISBN: 0-380-81772-1 • $7.99 ($10.99 Can.)

On Sale November 30th

To subscribe to the online monthly Eos newsletter, "OUT OF THIS WORLD"

the Cardinal's Cats

BY CHERITH BALDRY
ILLUSTRATION BY CRAIG MCKAY

Your loving and loyal cat will always come to your rescue. Well, if it means her own comfort is at stake ...

"DEBTS! AND MORE DEBTS!" CARDINAL RICHELIEU'S THIN, nervous hands riffled through the papers scattered on the table in front of him. "What in God's name were you thinking of?"

"One must live," the young marquis muttered.

"In your case," retorted the cardinal, "I begin to question the necessity."

Soumise crouched under a nearby chair, the tip of her tail twitching as she glared balefully at the boots of the Marquis de Pont-Courlay. He smelled of the stable, but at least he had not brought his hunting dogs into the cardinal's private apartments. The stupid creatures were no fun even to tease.

The young man was shuffling his feet in embarrassment. "Uncle, I didn't realize—"

"Evidently." Cardinal Richelieu's voice was scathing. "Less than five years ago I settled your debts for you, and at that time you promised amendment. And now look at all this!" He selected one sheet of paper and peered at it. "Five hundred livres for a coat—what was it made of, cloth of gold? And here—four thousand livres for horses!"

"Matched grays, Uncle," the marquis said enthusiastically. "As sweet a pair of high-steppers as you'd wish to see."

Soumise caught a flash of interest in Richelieu's face, ruthlessly suppressed a second later. She flicked her ears irritably. She could never understand her cardinal's partiality to horses—clumsy brutes who never looked where they were putting their great feet—when so many of her own kind daily demonstrated their superiority.

"It won't do, François," the cardinal said, tossing aside the papers. "Why do you not attend to your duties in Le Havre, instead of living this fast life here in Paris?"

"Oh, Le Havre ..." The marquis shrugged. "It's not amusing there."

"And living well beyond your means is amusing? Perhaps you would like to discover whether the inside of a debtor's prison is also amusing?"

"You wouldn't do that!" Pont-Courlay was outraged. He flung himself into Soumise's chair, narrowly missing her as he swung one booted foot, spitting, she flashed out a paw and scored clawmarks down the gleaming leather. "Think of the family name!"

"I think of it rather more than you do." The cardinal sighed. "Very well, François, leave it with me. I'll see what may be done."

"Thank you, Uncle!" Outrage forgotten, the marquis sprang up again and advanced toward Richelieu, hand extended. "I knew you wouldn't let me down."

Richelieu ignored the hand. "Good day, François."

His nephew stared at him for a moment longer, bafflement warring with exultation on his face, then turned and went out. Cardinal Richelieu winced as the door slammed. Leaning one elbow on the table, he pinched the bridge of his nose between finger and thumb, his eyes closed, his forehead corrugated into a frown. Perhaps, Soumise thought, one of his devastating headaches was coming on. It might be time to see what a soothing purr would do. Not from affection, she assured herself, only that she hated the running feet and strange smells that went with her cardinal's illnesses, not to mention Dr. Sitos, who would do his best –poor deluded idiot—to banish her from the bedchamber.

She was about to emerge from under her chair when someone rapped on the door. It opened again and the jovial face of Boisrobert, the Cardinal's secretary, looked into the room.

"There's one more petitioner, sir."

"Another?" Richelieu sighed and straightened. "Very well, Le Bois. Send him in."

"It's a her, sir. Quite . . ." Boisrobert's hands traced expressive contours in the air. "But for all that . . . she looks a bit dubious to me."

"Hmm ..." The cardinal's eyes gleamed interest. "You have, I assume, checked her for hidden daggers or anything tedious of that nature?"

"Naturally."

"Then send her in. But stay within call."

Boisrobert vanished and Soumise crept back into her shelter as the mysterious petitioner appeared in the doorway. She was a tall woman, her gown completely covered by a black cloak with a hood. Beneath it her face showed pale and haggard, she was not young, though she had once been beautiful, as humankind reckoned beauty. In no way comparable, Soumise thought, licking a paw complacently, to me.

Female petitioners usually rushed to kneel at the cardinal's feet and kiss his ring. This woman stayed where she was until Richelieu gestured her to a chair and said, "Good day, Madame. What may I do for you?"

The woman seated herself not in Soumise's chair, but in one opposite, so that Soumise had a good view of her as she flung back her cloak and revealed the figure that had impressed Boisrobert. Her gown was of plain gray silk, her hair a rich chestnut flecked with gray, coiled neatly into her neck. She was using no arts to attract, none of the face paint or carefully placed patches that the court ladies affected, yet she had the self-assured air of a lady.

"It's rather," she said in answer to the cardinal's question, "a matter of what I can do for you."

Richelieu's brows went up a fraction. "Indeed?"

"Monseigneur, I am a seeker on the path of spiritual perfection." Her voice had an unfamiliar lilt in it. "I would lead you down that path, too."

"*You* would lead *me*, Madame?" The cardinal's demeanor grew suddenly icy. "I regret that—"

"Wait, Monseigneur." The woman raised a hand, apparently unaware of the effrontery of interrupting a prince of the Church. "There are many things that I can offer you. The first is gold—you have need of gold, do you not?"

Richelieu made an involuntary movement toward the heap of his nephew's bills, but left it unfinished. "Everyone needs gold, Madame," he said dryly.

"Indeed. You are of course a wealthy man, but you have great expenses, too. The gold would not come amiss, I think. And yet it would take more than gold to interest you, would it not?"

"Go on," said the cardinal.

"If I were to mention . . . the Elixir?"

"Ah ..." The cardinal drew in his breath sharply.

"The whole of France knows how you spend yourself," the woman went on. Her eyes looked huge—and almost as lustrous as mine, Soumise thought—as she fixed them on the cardinal. "Your health is poor. I could help you, my lord cardinal. To have your strength, to be young again, to have another life to give to France ..?"

Soumise, disquieted, saw that Richelieu's hands were shaking, yet his voice was even as he said, "You are an alchemist, Madame?"

"I prefer to say 'philosopher.' That word 'alchemist'—it covers so many charlatans, so many deluded fools. I am neither a charlatan nor a fool. I say that I can do this. I can turn base metal into gold. I can make the Elixir of Life."

Cardinal Richelieu was silent, sizing her up. She bore his scrutiny without shrinking for a moment, and then added, "Yes even that is not all. As I said to you at first, I can lead you down the path of spiritual perfection." Her voice grew softer, throbbing with enticement. "Is that not what you want most of all? You are a man

"You shall have all his wealth," she repeated softly. "And I shall have his soul, to feed on for all eternity."

of God, and yet you serve France too. How often must you put the claims of France before the claims of God? What would you give to draw close to Him again?"

The cardinal closed his eyes briefly and let out a long sigh. "Ah, yes, that ..." His eyes snapped open again. "What do you want from me? Money?"

"No, my lord cardinal. I will not take a single sou from you. What I need is a place to work, somewhere secluded, away from prying fools and gossips. Give me that, for just a little while, and you will have all I have promised you."

For a long time the cardinal was silent, his hands steepled, fingertips together, a frown between his brows, and his gaze fixed on nothing. Soumise could see the longing in his eyes. The woman waited composedly.

"Very well," Richelieu said at last. "Give your direction to my secretary. He will provide you with what you need to transport your . . . equipment to a more suitable place, where you may prove to me whether you speak the truth."

"Thank you, Monseigneur." The woman rose and dropped a deep curtsey. "Be sure, I will perform all I have promised." She rose and turned to go.

"Wait," the cardinal said. "Madame, you have not told me your name."

As the woman paused beside Soumise's chair, an unfamiliar scent wafted toward her. Soumise opened her jaws to draw it in, and tasted fire, metal, and something harsher she could not name. She sneezed, but the sound was lost in the rustle of the woman's skirts as she withdrew toward the door.

"You may call me Marie," she said.

Once she had gone, Soumise crept out from under her chair, padded across the carpet, and leaped into the cardinal's lap, flexing her claws deep into the scarlet silk of his robes. Absently the cardinal passed a hand over her head, as if he scarcely realized

she was there Imperiously, Soumise let out a mew She had waited patiently while those tedious people monopolized her cardinal's attention, now it was time for him to give some to her

Instead, the cardinal unhooked her claws and set her gently down on the floor again. "I'm sorry, little one," he said "There are things I must do "

As Soumise stared at him in outrage, he collected up the marquis's papers and went out

She was still staring after him when she heard a soft thud on the carpet behind her, and spun round to see that Felimare had just leaped in through the open window He batted at her with one paw, evidently expecting her to roll over on her back, ready to wrestle

"Not now!" she snapped "Be serious a moment, please!"

Felimare shrugged, his tiger-striped coat rippling in the warm evening light "What's the matter?" he asked

"I'm not sure " Soumise tasted the air again, detecting the lingering traces of the woman s scent. "Something is going on here, and I don't like it at all. Be quiet and listen

FOR ALL SOUMISE S MISGIVINGS, NOTHING DISTURBED THE routine of the Palais-Cardinal in the next five days Her cardinal gave audiences, attended divine service, discussed literature with several boring poets, and most importantly recovered himself to give Soumise and the rest their proper due of attention

On the sixth morning Soumise was curled up in her preferred sleeping place on a shelf in the linen room, when loud footsteps woke her and the door banged open.

"Out! Out!" A large woman in voluminous skirts flapped a towel at her "Cat hairs on my lord Cardinal's sheets! Whatever next!"

Soumise hissed at her and fled, but there was no refuge. The whole house was in uproar The cardinal was moving out: Soumise had experienced the process before, but that did not mean she had to like it. She went to ground in a clothes press between the folds of the cardinal's robes, from where she was extracted at last by the cardinal himself. He lifted her with gentle hands and held her against his shoulder all the way down the stairs and out to where his coach was waiting As he sat down and settled Soumise on his lap, Felimare bounded up the coach steps and whisked his tail through the door before it closed

"There, there, little one," murmured the cardinal "Don t be afraid. We're going to Rueil—you like it there."

"I am *not* afraid," Soumise mewed haughtily, though the cardinal—intelligent for a human but still not intelligent enough—did not understand a word

"We believe you." Felimare grinned at her as he settled himself on the seat cushion with his paws tucked under him "You were just hiding for fun."

"Peasant," Soumise snarled

As the horses moved off and the coach lurched forward she slat ted her eyes and pretended to be asleep

The other important members of the household traveled separately, and when Soumise and Felimare stepped out onto the terrace at Rueil they were all there. Serpolet, stretched out full length to doze in a patch of sunlight Pyrame and Thisbe, curled up together as usual, Ludovic le Cruel, sniffing for rats at the bottom of the steps that led to the lawn, where Racan, Perruque, and Gazette were dashing madly round in circles Rubis sur l'Ongle, seated on the terrace parapet with her tail curled neatly round her paws Mounard le Fougueux, pacing up and down as if looking for trouble, which he usually was, unaware that Lucifer, a black shadow, was stalking him Mimi-Pailion, engaged in her favorite activity of admiring her own creamy-white fur reflected in the window.

"Soumise!" Ludoviska, a tabby and white bundle of energy, bounced up to Soumise and flicked her tail toward the box-tree walk "Look! *Peacocks!*"

"Ahhh ..." Soumise felt a purr gather in her throat How generous of her cardinal, to provide not only food and comfort, but entertainment too. The cardinal was right She *did* like Rueil, and was only sorry that he did not have the leisure to spend much time there. "Better make the most of it," she mewed

What Soumise liked best at Rueil was to leave the formal gar dens behind and cross the wild borders to the woods where she could slip through deep brakes of fern, dab a paw into small, trickling streams where she imagined fish must lurk, stalk birds across soft beds of moss or chase golden coins of sunlight as they shivered through the branches

The morning after their arrival she left Ludoviska and Gazette batting a peacock feather around the terrace and headed with Felimare toward the distant trees

"The forester's cottage?" Felimare suggested

"If you like "

The cottage was abandoned, its roof beginning to collapse, a great place for mice and shrews Soumise was still stuffed comfortably full of breakfast the cook at Rueil made creamed chicken exactly as she liked it—and would have preferred to explore, but for once she let Felimare take the lead. A good fat mouse never came amiss

But when they came to the edge of the clearing where the cottage stood, Soumise and Felimare saw that the tumbledown roof had been patched with fresh straw. The sagging window shutters were back in place, and a thread of smoke rose from the chimney

Felimare let out a frustrated hiss. "Someone's there!"

"So?" Soumise flicked her tail nonchalantly "They might be good for a bowl of cream."

She had taken a step into the open when a breeze rippled over the grass and brought a scent to her—the same scent that had clung to the woman who visited Richelieu that day at the Palais-Cardinal Fire, hot metal, and the harsh tang she could not identify She stepped back and crouched low in the ferns

"What—" Felimare sounded irritated

"Get down, shot! She's there—the woman I told you about "

"In there?" Felimare gaped, and then flopped to the ground as Soumise lashed out a claw, barely missing his nose. "What's she doing there?"

"I told you The cardinal promised her a place to work. But not here not at Rueil"

She was furious Rueil was beautiful, at Rueil she could be free and wild, at Rueil her cardinal had the leisure to give her the attention she deserved. To smell that hot, raw scent here was as shocking as if someone had ripped off her fur

"I'm going to look," she mewed

"Be careful," Felimare warned her, but she ignored him as she streaked across the clearing, leaped onto the window ledge and peered through a crack in the shutters

Light leaking in showed Soumise the room that had been bare for as long as she could remember It was bare no longer Shelves lined the walls, filled with glass vessels of bewildering shapes and sizes Bunches of herbs hung from the ceiling, along with the bleached skeleton of some small animal—surely not a *cat*, Soumise thought, shivering In the center of the room was a table, piled high with books and parchment scrolls, and the section of floor that Soumise could see was inscribed with strange symbols Where the fireplace had been was an oven built of brick.

As she still squinted through the crack, trying to make sense of it all, she heard the sound of another cat scrambling up beside her on the sill Expecting to see Felimare, she drew back, only to let out a hiss of mingled shock and anger at the sight of a stranger.

The skinny gray cat crouched facing her, his staring pelt bristling with defiance The same reek came off him that Soumise had smelled before. "Get out!" he spat. "This is my place."

Soumise wasn't taking that from any cat, let alone this mangy stray She drew herself up on all four paws, arching her back. "I

beg your pardon? *I* am the favorite of Cardinal Richelieu himself, who happens to own this estate. How *dare* you—"

A loud yowl interrupted her and she turned to see Felimare racing across the open ground toward them, his tiger-striped fur fluffed up until he looked twice his normal size. He hurled himself at the strange cat and the pair of them fell off the window sill to land with a thump in the long grass at the foot of the wall, where they wrestled in a screeching knot of fur.

Soumise sat watching interestedly, giving her white front the occasional lick, until her ears pricked at the sound of footsteps inside the cottage. "Stop it, idiots!" she hissed, springing down. "Someone's coming."

Felimare rolled away from the intruder, letting him scramble up, and all three cats dived for shelter in a clump of ferns as the door to the cottage opened. The woman Marie emerged, whom Soumise had already seen at the Palais-Cardinal, she looked subtly different from that night, though before Soumise could work out what the difference was she found herself staring at the man who followed Marie, fastening his lace collar and then halting just outside the door to run his hands through rumpled dark hair. It was the cardinal's nephew, the Marquis de Pont-Courlay.

Soumise opened her jaws to let out a shriek of outrage, only to gag on a mouthful of fur as Felimare thrust his tail across her muzzle. Sparing him a swift glare, she watched as the marquis took Marie in his arms and the two of them clung together in a long embrace.

As they broke apart Soumise got a good look at her for the first time, and realized how she had changed. Her pale skin was luminous now, the harsh lines of her face smoothed away. The gray wasn gone from her hair; it was longer and lustrous, spilling down her back. Her lips were full and moist. She still looked older than the marquis, but her beauty was ageless.

"Go now," she whispered. "All shall be as we planned, if you can do your part."

"I'll do it." Pont-Courlay's voice was thick. "Never fear. I'll send you word when it will be."

Marie laughed, a soft, throaty sound. "And then you shall have all his wealth."

"I don't care about the old devil's wealth." The marquis grabbed Marie again and brought his mouth down on hers. "I only want you."

"You shall have that too, my dear," she promised. "But go now, before we're discovered."

The marquis took a final kiss before striding off through the trees. Marie stood watching him go. When he was out of sight, she turned back toward the cottage, and Soumise drew in a hissing breath to see how she had changed again. The glamour that had lain over her was gone; she was once more the haggard creature of the Palais-Cardinal.

"You shall have all his wealth," she repeated softly. "And I shall have his soul, to feed on for all eternity."

She turned and went back into the cottage. As soon as the door closed behind her, Soumise sprang to her paws, and Felimare released the gray cat, whom he had kept pinned down by a massive paw on his neck.

"What is your woman?" Soumise spat. "A witch? A demon?"

The gray cat crouched on the ground in front of them, skinny body writhing in self-abasement. "I don't know what she is," he mewed. "Don't hurt me! I'd leave her if I could."

"And mice can fly," Soumise sneered. "If you want to leave, why don't you?"

For all her contempt, she felt a real chill as she saw the fear that welled up in the strange cat's yellow eyes.

"She'd fetch me back," he whined. "She's powerful ... and old, older than she looks. She'd find me, wherever I went."

"Perhaps not," mewed Felimare.

Soumise whipped her head around to glare at him. "I hope you're not thinking of *helping* this mangy hairball! After what we've just seen!"

"It's not the cat's fault." Felimare was infuriatingly calm. "If you want to leave her," he went on, "we can show you how."

"How?" The gray cat was cringing, yet along with the fear in his eyes Soumise thought she could see the first stirrings of hope. Against her will, she started to feel sorry for the wretched creature.

"We will find you a ship," she mewed. "You can travel to the new world that lies to the west. She won't follow you there."

"Maybe ..." A shiver passed through the gray cat's body. "What must I do?"

"Nothing, for now," mewed Felimare. "When the household moves back to Paris, you must stow away and come with us. Then we'll arrange to put you on a ship."

The gray cat still groveled on the ground in front of him, beginning to babble out his thanks. "If there's anything I can do for you—"

"There is," Soumise interrupted. "The Marquis de Pont-Courlay—" she flicked her tail toward the spot among the trees where the young man had vanished—"said he would send your woman word when whatever-it-is will take place. We want to know that, too."

"I'll find out," mewed the gray cat. "I swear I will. As soon as the message comes, I'll—"

"All right, no need to go on so," Soumise snapped. "Now be off! You'll be hearing from us."

As the gray cat slunk away into the ferns, Soumise shared a glance with Felimare and saw her own apprehension reflected in her friend's green gold eyes. The cardinal had called Marie "alchemist", she styled herself "philosopher." But she had shown herself, beyond all doubt, to be a thing of darkness. What was she plotting with the marquis? What was the danger to the cardinal, that would end with the marquis inheriting all his wealth, and his soul enslaved to Marie herself? And how could Soumise possibly warn him?

SOUMISE'S ANGER WITH THE WOMAN AND HER CAT INCREASED as the days slipped by. She could not enjoy the visit to Rueil. Even persecuting the peacocks had lost its savor. She was almost relieved when the gray cat crept up through the gardens as twilight gathered. He was almost invisible as he hugged the shadows of the box-tree walk, to hiss into her ear, "It's now. It will be tonight."

As soon as he had delivered the message he spun around and would have fled, but Felimare loomed over him, and Mounard le Fougueux pinned his tail to the ground with a well-placed claw.

"What will be tonight?" Felimare demanded. "What's happening down there?"

The gray cat shivered, his eyes pale in the dying light. "She is preparing a great work of magic. She will conjure demons."

"Is the marquis with her?" Soumise asked.

"No—I haven't seen him. Let me go ..."

Felimare nodded, and Mounard le Fougueux released the gray cat's tail, swiping him across one ear to speed his retreat. When his gray pelt had dissolved into the dusk, Felimar mewed, "Now what do we do?"

"We go there." Soumise felt as if every hair on her pelt was prickling with excitement and terror. "We stop it, whatever it is."

"How?" Lucifer paused to groom his sleek black shoulder before he added, "You'll end up as a tortoiseshell muff, Soumise, if you go messing with demons."

"Imbecile!" Soumise spat. "Would you sit here and do nothing? Where do you think our next bowl of cream will come from, if our cardinal is destroyed? We—"

She broke off at the sound of footsteps crossing the terrace. The flicker of a dark lantern showed her Cardinal Richelieu himself descending the steps to where the cats crouched together at the entrance to the box-tree walk. He was dressed not in the scarlet

robes of his office, but in a priest's plain black soutane, only relieved by the white bands at his throat.

Soumise flung herself at him and leaped, claws hooked into the woollen fabric. Richelieu let out a muffled exclamation and put down the lantern to trap her in both hands as she scrambled up to his shoulder.

"No, little one," he murmured, detaching her and putting her down. As soon as he released her she sprang up again, only to be grabbed and held more firmly as she squirmed in front of the cardinal's face. His eyes were haunted. "No," he repeated sadly. "No one can come with me tonight. Go to the kitchens, little one. Jean-Pierre has fresh salmon for you."

He set her down on the steps, retrieved his lantern, and set off down the box-tree walk.

"Very well," Soumise mewed through clenched teeth. "We follow him. And then—"

This time she was interrupted by distant shouting, and the sound of many horses and carriage wheels. Ludoviska scampered up the steps and to the end of the terrace, from where there was a good view of the carriage drive. "Look!" she called back over her shoulder. "Visitors!"

Soumise hurried to join her. Three or four coaches were rolling up the drive, lanterns flaring at front and rear. They were flanked by outriders, finely dressed young men on glossy, high stepping horses. Soumise crouched, watching, feeling the fur on her neck and shoulders beginning to bristle. The horseman closest to her, reining in and dismounting in a single lithe movement, was the Marquis de Pont-Courlay.

The leading coach drew to a halt. Lantern light illuminated the three golden lilies of France emblazoned on its door. Pont-Courlay strode across and pulled the door open, bowing deeply as a man got out. He paused, glancing around, the light spilled on golden hair, gold laced coat, and embroidered cloak. Soumise let out a long, low hiss as she recognized King Louis himself.

The other young men had also dismounted and were climbing the steps that led to the main doors of the house. Servants inside must have noticed their arrival, for the doors were flung open to admit them. Soumise caught a glimpse of the steward, old Desbournais.

Silently withdrawing, she flicked her ears to summon Felimare. "Keep the others back," she murmured. "Send Racan and Perruque to watch the cottage, tell them to do nothing until I come. I'm going to find out what the marquis wants."

"What about our fresh salmon?" Mimi-Paillon's voice came from the darkness. Soumise ignored her.

Creeping through deserted salons, Soumise reached the entrance hall and peered cautiously out from behind a door. Servants were lighting lamps, while footmen offered wine to the royal guest and his entourage. Desbournais appeared from the direction of the main staircase and bowed before King Louis, one hand on his breast.

"I regret, sire, the cardinal is not at home."

"Be damned to that, man!" The king tossed off his wine and held out his glass for a refill. His face was reddened already from drinking, sagging from self-indulgence; he was not so young as he would like to appear. Soumise thought viciously. "Tell him he's keeping his king waiting."

"No, sire." The old steward's face was carefully bland, though Soumise detected a trace of disapproval in his voice. "My lord cardinal truly is not here. He is not in his apartments."

King Louis turned to the Marquis of Pont-Courlay with the face of a petulant child. "François, you promised me we could surprise the cardinal and force him to feast us. This isn't amusing at all."

More people were pressing through the door, ladies who must have traveled in the other coaches—or no, Soumise corrected herself, finely dressed women, for whatever they were, they were assuredly not ladies. *Lout*, she thought. *To bring such trash into the cardinal's house!*

"Never fear, sire," the marquis said. "I know where to find him. He goes down to a cottage in the woods—to pray, maybe."

He winked at the king as he spoke the last words, and King Louis threw back his head with a shout of laughter. "I've heard it called many things, but never that! He has a little friend tucked away there, does he?"

Pont-Courlay grinned. "As you say, sire. Perhaps we should go down there and disturb him at his … devotions?"

"Excellent!" The king snapped his fingers at Desbournais. "Bring us torches."

Desbournais bowed and withdrew. Soumise crept backward from the door, when she was well away she turned and fled, tripping a servant who was hastening from the kitchen with a jug of water. Leaving him to curse, she burst out onto the terrace and flung herself at Felimare.

"The marquis—the king!" she gasped. "They're going to the cottage." Whirling round to face the rest of her household, she added, "Delay them, all of you. Felimare, come with me."

Streaking down the box-tree walk and across the gardens, she never saw how her order was carried out, but she heard about it afterwards. Heard how Mimi-Paillon had wound herself around the king's ankles, flirting her tail and purring madly as she gazed up at him with adoring eyes. How Louis had laughed at first and stroked her, only to aim a kick at her as she persisted in entangling herself with his feet. How Rubis sur l'Ongle managed to tip over a vase, soaking the marquis's coat with stale flower water. How Ludovic le Cruel retrieved the rat he had caught two days before and presented it with great ceremony at King Louis's feet.

How Gazette and Ludoviska sprang up at the servants who were bringing the torches, risking sparks in their fur as they swung from the arms that bore up the flames. How Serpolet stretched himself out at the top of the steps from the terrace, almost achieving the succession of the king's infant son as Louis tripped over him and barely escaped breaking his neck. How Pyrame and Thisbe paced the king and the marquis down the box-tree walk, wailing like fiends from hell and flitting to and fro until the superstitious king was almost ready to turn back.

How Mounard le Fougueux and Lucifer had raced for the trees and lay each along a branch, wrangling amiably over which of them should have the honor of assaulting the king. How they had dropped neatly on the heads of King Louis and the marquis with a wild screech and claws digging fiercely into the noble necks. How the king had dropped his torch into the undergrowth; dry as it was from the summer's heat, it blazed up into a bonfire around which both men stumbled, cursing, as they tried to dislodge their unwanted headgear.

All that Soumise discovered later. Now she dashed for the woods, Felimare bounding along at her shoulder. The trees formed ghostly arches above them, as if they fled down the aisles of a vast cathedral, yet instead of holiness, Soumise thought she could scent evil in the very air.

What would happen to Cardinal Richelieu if the king caught him in the act of witchcraft? They would strip him of his wealth and give it into the greedy hands of the marquis. They would take away his cardinal's office and tie him to the stake, robe him in scarlet flame instead of silk. The France he loved would spit him out like a mouse's tail.

Did he know? Soumise asked herself. Did he suspect that the woman was not the philosopher she pretended to be? Was he so desperate for the healing of body and spirit she had offered him that he did not care?

Soumise and Felimare ran on. At the edge of the clearing they came upon Racan and Perruque. The twin ginger cats crouched among the ferns, eyes fixed on the cottage. Soumise followed their

gaze and her fur bristled as she saw red light leaking out through the shutters.

"Is the cardina. there?" she mewed

Racan nodded "There's no sign of that gray brute, though."

Soumise edged forward, her belly close to the ground When she reached the cottage door, she pressed it with a paw and was disgusted to find it closed She had already seen that the window shutters were tightly fastened. Spitting with annoyance, she sprang to the windowsill and from there clambered up an ivy branch until she reached the thatch Her nose wrinkled with distaste at the stink and the scurrying spiders that she dislodged as she began clawing her way through

Seconds later Felimare was beside her, tearing at the thatch with his strong claws "Are you sure about this?" he mewed

Stupid question! Soumise did not dignify it with a reply

An age seemed to pass by before she managed to make a hole big enough to crawl through, and let herself drop into the bed chamber The floorboards were bare, there was no furniture except for a bed and a chest. The door stood open, and Soumise ventured out to the top of the stairs

From here she could look down into the room below The hot, harsh stench was all around her The door of the oven was open and the woman Marie was working a bellows, until the flames roared high and the coals glowed a brilliant red.

Cardinal Richelieu was seated on a bench beside the door His face was intent as he watched Marie, and his fingers moved incessantly as he slipped the ivory beads of a rosary through his fingers

The gray cat was crouched near the flames, its eyes pools of fire

Marie closed the oven door, set aside the bellows, and took up a glass bowl from the table Carefully she set it in a bath of water on top of the oven, and stirred its contents with a rod As she stirred her lips moved, and Soumise could make out a soft incantation, though she could not distinguish the words The look of exultation on the woman s face chilled her to the depths of her fur

A vapor began to rise from the bowl. To Soumise it was as though a veil of darkness began to spread through the room. Her pelt prickled Beside her, Felimare let out a soft curse

The cardinal was suddenly alert, his fingers gripping the beads of the rosary. "Madame—"

"Be silent!" the woman snapped at him "This is the most delicate part of the operation Mar it, and all is lost."

Indeed? thought Soumise

Without pausing to consider, she launched herself down on top of the oven She collided with the water bath, tipping it on one side. The glass bowl shattered, its contents spilling and hissing, sending vapor billowing into the room. Soumise felt a moment's searing agony as her paws came into contact with the hot brick A flying leap took her to the table, the lamp crashed over. Oil spilt and flame began to lick at the pages of an open book Behind her she heard Felimare yowl and the woman shriek in fury.

Her next leap slammed her against the cardinal's chest as he began to rise. He clutched her automatically and she battered at him with sore paws, screeching, "Out! Out!

Frozen with confusion, for a few seconds Richelieu did nothing but hold her, stammering her name The room was flame and darkness, the air thick with a miasma that was more than smoke Whatever the woman had been conjuring, it was free now, and gathering itself with a malevolence that sent icy shudders through Soumise's body

It was the woman Marie herself who opened the door and fled out into the night in a dark whirl of draperies To Soumise's eyes, stinging and half blinded, she seemed to swoop upward, her fluttering robes transmuted to feathers, but the little cat could not be sure

Felimare shot out after her, the skinny gray cat hard on his tail And at last Richelieu turned, bent double by coughing but still clasping Soumise to his chest, and stumbled out into the open. Behind him came a soft explosion as flames erupted through the window and licked upward to the overhanging thatch, turning the whole building to a blazing torch. Twisting her neck to look back, Soumise saw something dark swell into the sky.

The cardinal had seen it, too. He recoiled a single pace, and then braced himself, holding up the ivory cross of the rosary His chest heaved as he fought for breath, yet he still managed to choke out the words, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, be gone!"

The darkness stooped over him Soumise cringed and fastened her claws into the cardinal's soutane To her own disgust she was whimpering like a lost kitten She thought she could discern eyes in the dark mass, their malevolence changing gradually to frustration and fury. For an eternal moment the shape hung above their heads, then it uncoiled itself, cracked like a whip over the trees, and vanished

The cardinal staggered to the nearest tree and leaned against it for support Soumise wriggled out of his grasp and dropped, wincing, to the ground beside Felimare. At the edge of the wood she could see another fire and hear some kind of outcry, faint with distance

At length the cardinal recovered enough to notice it, too, and begin to make his way toward it. Soon he came face to face with the Marquis de Pont Courlay. By the light of the leaping flames Soumise could make out consternation in the younger man's face, as he realized that he had no alchemy, no witchcraft to show the king, not even a "little friend," but only an elderly cleric, taking a blameless stroll in the evening air and overcome with shock at an unexplained fire in an abandoned cottage

And she saw the equal consternation in the face of her cardinal as he realized that the presence of his nephew the marquis could be no coincidence

Soumise sat on the terrace at Rueil, licking butter from scorched paws Her household was sprawled around her, basking in the sunlight The gray cat was with them, already looking less skinny after several bowls of fresh salmon and cream He was even more efficient than Rubis sur l'Ongle at licking up the last drops from the bottom of the bowl

"And then," Lucifer mewed, "the stupid creature dropped his torch, and the whole wood went up in flames."

Soumise yawned She had lost count of the times her friends had told their story, but she herself did not want to tell what she had seen. She would leave that to Felimare Instead, she got up and padded softly into the house.

The cardinal was in his bedchamber Of course, he had paid for the night s adventure For hours there had been comings and goings. Dr. Sitois in attendance, feet thumping everywhere, strange smells and noises. At least, Soumise thought with a contemptuous sniff, King Louis had taken himself and his floozies back to Versailles, and the marquis had gone with them

The door to the bedchamber was open a crack, and Soumise slid inside The cardinal lay in bed, propped up on pillows His face was the color of the linen, his eyes sunken One hand rested inert on an open book

Soumise trotted across the room and sprang up on the bed, kneading the embroidered bedcover The cardinal's eyes flickered open; his hand moved enough to stroke her head. He whispered, "Little one."

She could not bear to see the despair in his eyes.

Creeping closer, she curled herself in the warm place by his side. His fingers still fluttered down her spine, giving her a delicious tingle She felt a purr rising into her throat.

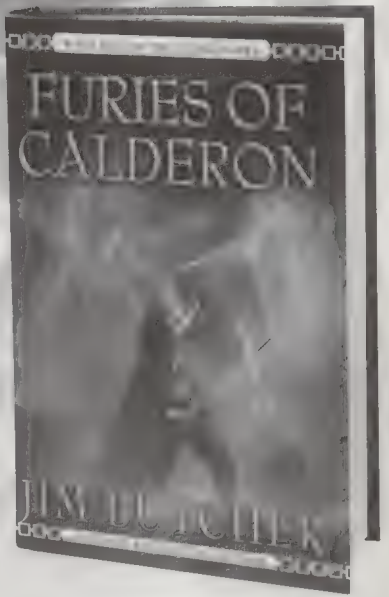
After a little while the cardinal s hand was still, resting lightly on her back. His breathing steadied, grew slower Soumise raised her head and saw that he was sleeping ❧

A New Series from National Bestselling Author

JIM BUTCHER

"Epic fantasy in the best way, inspired by Tolkien."*

In the realm of Alera, where people bond with the furies–elementals of earth, air, fire, water, and metal–fifteen-year-old Tavi strug gles with his lack of furycrafting. But when his homeland erupts in chaos–when rebels war with loyalists and furies clash with furies–Tavi's courage and resourcefulness may prove to be a power greater than any fury–one that could turn the tides of war. . .



"Filled with plot twists and white-knuckle suspense, this is a ripping good yarn that delivers terrific magic and nonstop action, a page-turner all the way."

–National bestselling author Deborah Chester

"Butcher's book is sharp, fast-moving, full of deadly dangers and double dealing."

–**New York Times* bestselling author Simon R. Green

"A stay-up-all-night-'til-you-finish-it-book, Furies of Calderon is a marvelous read."

–Patricia Briggs, author of Raven's Shadow

Now available in hardcover from Ace.

ACE

0-441-01199-3/$23.95

A member of Penguin Group (USA)
www.penguin.com

Swords MADE OF WOOD

The mermaid will always return to the sea, but not, perhaps, in the way she might wish

By Leah Bobet
Illustration by Matt Hughes

I [illegible] conversation and a kiss.

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [

So because they were royal, because he was handsome and she lovelier than the dawn, because she could sing down magic from the heavens, call birds, beasts, fish, and flower to her bidding, it was considered an ill-luck match

They were very happy together

Until the day the lady vanished.

I.

The morning after the great Traders' Ball, the Prince rises, and his lady is not beside him. He thinks little of it; at times she rises early, gazes over the harbor like a keening bird with the scream echoed only in her eyes. He is a good man, her Prince. He knows how much she has given up for him, has seen how she stands in the beautiful silken gowns he bought to clothe that half-divine form. Legs always together, nary a gap between them, pressed tight like a tail cloven in two. She sings like the greatest mages of the city, strong and powerful in one moment and then delicate and sure the next, but refuses to learn to dance.

She is not there, so he dines alone on eggs and smoked fish and delicacies from foreign lands. She is not there, so he sits on the double throne alone, and governs the country alone. She is not there, but it is only at noon that he starts to worry, real worry like a stone in the pit of his stomach. A few trusted individuals are sent to search the palace.

At sunset, they come back with nothing. Not a clue, not a hint, nobody who has seen her come or go. He gathers up more, sends them throughout his great city, instructed to scour every shimmering spire and basement room, every ship's deck in the harbor. It takes them until noon the next day, but exhausted, empty-handed, they straggle back one by one.

The Prince spends a sleepless night wringing his hands, sharpening his sword, practicing words of judgment and forgiveness and sorrow in turn as his mood shifts like the tides. By morning he is bleak and thin; by noon he has become the color of sea foam and just as restless.

A summons goes out for the harbor master to bring his record book: all ships entering and leaving port since the ball the night before. The Royal Navy is pulled out of tavern and wives' beds alike, the figureheads on the ships blessed anew for safe journeying.

Somewhere in the bustle and hustle of the court's panic, a courtier the Prince has never seen before whispers something into his ear.

A halt: the harbor master is dismissed, the Royal Navy sent back to their beds, the court pushed flying from the Prince's hall. For seven days, the ships dock and depart, dock and depart, and the Prince sits alone, brooding and silent. On the seventh day, he rises and proclaims to the city in a voice that does not shake: *I shall set aside the Sea God's daughter and take a new wife.*

Nobody understands it, rumors fly through the air, dive through the deeps, burrow into the cellars and workshops and mansions. The Prince loves his wife, however foolishly. She loves him in return, or as much as one of her kind can love.

But it is an ill-luck marriage, and so the city sits silent.

The night before this endless morning after, while the Prince dances at his ball and his lady stands silent in the corner watching, a tiny speck of dust floats among the halls of the palace. It finds the Lady Prunella, an aged scion of a fading house, slathered with cosmetics that ill-become an ill face. She is rich beyond imagining. Her family is one of those who carve the figureheads for the ships, an ancient practice passed down father to daughter to son. She can sing the magic into oak and pine to keep sailors safe during the long nights. But she is vain, vain to the core, and no longer has the smooth cheek to back up her airs.

The speck of dust alights on her shoulder, whispers in her ear. *You are a beautiful lady, the most beautiful in the hall tonight.*

She blushes, and smiles, and looks around for the flatterer. Someone appreciates her charms, after all these years, someone knows enough to see truth.

The speck of dust floats away: It knows the lady is not beautiful. It knows it has spoken a lie. But the lady has believed him, and so it is the tiniest bit bigger, the tiniest bit more powerful.

It circles through the ballroom, depositing sweet falsehoods with each powerful lord and honoree ship's master. *Your ship is the fastest and fittest. You have the Prince's favor above all others. The hatred others show you is merely jealousy.*

It grows bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and more easily believed.

By the time the night is over, it is man-sized and man-shaped, garbed in flash and glamour and pleasing to every eye. By the end of the next day, its tongue is silver and honey and charm and it is ready to be of service. Its master has given it a mission, a simple and delicate and crucial mission.

Noon comes around, and in the hustle and bustle of the court's panic, it sidles up to the Lord Prince and whispers something into his ear. *She has left you, and fled to her father in the ocean.*

Then it dissolves into dust.

II.

Even in the popular mythology of the countries beyond the peninsula, where mermaids and the Sea God were just a fairy tale, none ever quite capture what it means to give up one's tail for legs. A tail is impenetrable, solid and armored with glistening scales, powerful enough to break the bones of one's enemies. It is freedom itself, unity, divine permission to explore the Sea God's realm. Citizenship and favor.

When a woman gives up her tail for smooth legs—and it is always women, never men—she also gains that which is between the legs. She must take in food and excrete it, where no nourishment was ever needed. She must bleed at every full moon, feel racking pains in her belly and thighs. She must suffer a man to invade her body and only for a very few does that ever reach pleasure. A man can invade her body, and plant children inside of it like he sows the corn into the ground. This is intolerable in ways we can never understand: The sea is united always, one body existing without division or break or sever. On land, one is divided, between husband and children, sky and land, right and left, man and woman, home and the home you left behind. These are the things nobody is ever told when they pack their bags, kiss their sisters and cousins goodbye knowing they will never be able to visit or write. These are the things discovered later, when the pangs of birth and blood and loneliness shake the new, unfamiliar body to the bones.

But in the peninsula, women still flee the depths for dry land, for the hot glances of men that no ocean can cool. Men still seek them out, pretending to be unaware of the agony they cause, but fully able to hear the tears of stolen wives at night.

Why?

At least one of these questions can be answered. In the taverns, in the back ways and the places only men will go at night, it is whispered that a child of the Sea God tastes sweet inside, sweet and like salt.

So this is what really happened.

There is a ship's captain, a man known only as Another, who has traveled to the peninsula for the Traders' Ball. He is a broad and hard man, dark outside and in, and he can sing magic,

A tail is impenetrable, solid and armored with glistening scales, powerful enough to break the bones of one's enemies. It is freedom itself, unity, divine permission to explore the Sea God's realm. Citizenship and favor.

although he hides it well In his home city the mages take any child with a voice into their crèche, raise them to rules and forbid knowledge beyond what they themselves possess. Another's parents hid him in the house and warned him to silence, total silence, even when he speaks—and it is seldom—one can hear the music in his considered, ominous bass

Because his voice has just that hint of magic, when he told the harbor master he had journeyed to buy a figurehead for *Ocean's Daughter,* he was believed Many travel from every corner of the world to the peninsula for this selfsame purpose Even in the nations where the Sea God is just a story, everyone knows that sailors are damned, sinners and wrongdoers all. It is only the figure on the prow of the ship, the shape of a pure-hearted virgin or blameless beast, that keeps the sea-god from smashing it in his fists The Sea God is tempestuous and easily changeable, but he is also a god of compassion He will not sacrifice the innocent.

Another, like all visiting captains, is an honored guest at the Traders' Ball. The peninsula venerates the waves, and even the cursed men who traverse them, if for nothing else than their boldness He watches the couples waltz up and down the hall, samples food and drink When the Prince and his lady arrive to applause and well-wishes, he plucks a speck of dust from his doublet and hums a soft melody, strange and seductive, under his breath It is released into the air and floats into the darkness

The Princess does not dance, he notes, and halfway through the evening he approaches her. A bow and a smile: "My Lady."

She nods acknowledgment without a word; her eyes are all for her Prince, whirling like a dervish across the dance floor with another woman, deep in his cups but not deep enough to forget her leaning against the west wall alone

"My Lady," he says again. "You do not dance."

A response without a glance, distant and cold as a sailor's grave "All the nation knows I do not dance."

He moves around her, until she cannot but look at him. "In which case, I offer a riddle for your pleasure."

She notes him now, his darkness and hot eyes and fire. Another can see an interest in her impassive face, a spark of curiosity. It is curiosity that kills these women, drives them into the dry summer air He has chosen his weapons well. "I would greatly enjoy an entertainment," she replies

He smiles a smile that would send mortal women screaming. But the lady has swum with sharks before and pays it no heed "Why, My Lady, do the figureheads carved in this land for the prow of every ship, every vessel always have their mouths open to the wind?"

Her forehead crinkles, and she ponders. It is true: never sealed lips or a mysterious smile, never anything but mouth wide open "They are singing, Milord," and she is satisfied with her answer They are singing the magic that is the safety of the ship."

His smile grows wider. "Wrong."

She is startled, and she steps back once, involuntarily. "What then?"

He offers his arm to her, elegantly swathed in black velvet. "I can show you the answer if you would like it."

There is a hint of music in his voice, and she can do little else but nod her assent The same spur that drove her from the ocean, from the bosom of father and family, is at her heels again

They leave the party and nobody sees them go.

III.

Men are cruel. In the peninsula and all nations around it, this is what is whispered between women. Men are cruel. They will eat your heart up, lock it in a box, sleep beside you night upon night until you no longer smell like your own skin

The women never stop going to them, and the men, kind or vicious in turn, are never collectively less cruel. Nobody ever asks why. Just like women, the men have their secrets.

When the first man tempted his wife from the ocean with words of love, with the promise of something dangerous and exotic and delicious on the tongue—something she could not get at home—he had a realization. Woman can be tempted away from father and mother and hearth, if he became commonplace and tired, if he allowed the corners to be worn off his memory until it was soft and comfortable, could she not also be tempted away from him?

Out of love, then, and out of fear and competition and instinct buried deeper than bone, men are cruel in the peninsula They divide their wives and possess them, they leash them with promises of pleasures untasted. They arm themselves with guilt and kindness alike, and go to war for the hearts of their beloved ones.

Drunk on the danger, the excitement, the hint of tantalizing goodness they know exists within each man, the women call men cruel and never leave

Unless someone crueler knocks on the door

When they are shipboard, where the air is cool and the wind smells like homesickness, the man who calls himself Another turns to her. "You are certain that you desire the answer?"

She nods again, a little more impatient this time. The spray will ruin her silken gown: Not that she minds this, but her maids will cluck their tongues and scold, her husband give her an injured look as if it is him the sea has spit upon, the courtiers talk and mutter like they do over every move she makes

Another's hand on her back guides her to the prow of the ship from which she can see the lights of all her city, the depths of her home. She looks at him in surprise. "There is no figurehead on your ship!"

He nods his assent, those coal-black eyes still steady on hers. "Indeed."

Fear sends a shoot into her bosom and she steps away from him, but too late, too late! Two snaps, and her arms are shackled to the prow in chains of iron, two more and her legs are bound as well. She screams, but the city is at festival: there is nobody to hear. Already the lines are cast off as the sailors raise the huge canvas that will bear them away onto the ocean. Orders are shouted and the timbers creak, and the midnight tide takes them farther

and farther away from everything she knows

When they are well at sea, Another returns to her, tall and proud and every inch a captain She stares into his face, into his eyes, and finds nothing there to appeal to or attack. "You are a wicked man," she merely says, and despairs.

"I know," he replies "That is why I have brought you with me."

Her startlement rattles the chains of her prison

He paces the deck with the rolling gait of a man of the sea "I am a wicked man," he says "Wickeder than most I can sing the souls he gets from sky and earth. I can sing destruction. And I am captain of a ship that has no figurehead to protect its passage "

"Then my father the Sea God will feast on your bones," she tells him, and believes it to be true

He shakes his head, laughs gossamer notes that pierce her like arrows "The Sea God will harm no ship blessed with the image of an innocent, be it man or beast or any creature that exists I am a wicked man. I need special protection from his wrath Tell me, would the soft hearted Sea God harm his own daughter?"

The lady starts to tremble "You mean to keep me here forever"

"I do Spirit of my ship, good luck omen You will not be taken from me Even a daughter of the ocean cannot sing away iron shackles "

It is true, she cannot, but desperate, she tries another tactic "And if my Prince gives chase? I forsook the waves for him not without difficulty; he underwent trials and labors to win my heart He will not give it up so easily "

He draws the magic circle around her, neat and even in paint that dries quickly "He will not find you even if he searches the world round "

Another starts to sing in his deep, rich voice, a song of slowness and time, of grains and polish and placid eternity so unlike any thing the ocean's child has ever known. He sings and he paces, walking circles around her as she shivers trapped on his ship's prow Hours pass, the stars start to fade, and still he sings. He does not fall silent until the sunrise and then he vanishes to his bed as the sailors stir for the changing of the watch

The dying night is chill, and as the air begins to warm, the lady, bedazzled by his magic, prays that the stiffness in her limbs is merely the cold

On the second night he sings, and by morning her feet have fused to the wood of the ship's deck The chains have vanished, unneeded She cannot move She sings to the fish, to the creatures of the deeps, pleads to them for help and succor They promise to carry messages to her father, to her family, messages of danger and despair

On the third night he sings, and by morning she can no longer feel her legs. They have joined together again, just like they were when she traversed the oceans, but hard and warm this time There are no scales to protect her When she looks down, she sees varnished mahogany where her fine gown once was

On the fourth night he sings, and her hips are swallowed up by the magic She cries for help again, begs the seabirds to carry messages to her Prince, to guide the Royal Navy to her prison and her plight They do not answer. Her voice is awkward and strange, her tongue heavy and stiff in her mouth, and they do not recognize her when she calls

On the fifth night he sings, and her flung-back arms feel strange and solid She can feel the rest of the ship now, feel it like it was her own body The sailors' steps on the rigging and planking tickle her skin Her mind is growing distant and faint, caught up in the details of wind and waves and the creak of ropes. Fish swarm about the hull, screaming of aid and a wild hunt through the waves, but she cannot hear them

On the sixth night he sings, and it is up to her neck, only her head is free, and she cannot turn it She wonders if this is such a bad thing after all: she transformed once before, a horrible, burning severance that left her weeping and weak and changed. She adapted She lived on, and for a while was happy, even if she missed the things she had given up. She will continue again, perhaps, in the same fashion Maybe she will be happy again

On the seventh night he sings and sings, and she can feel the solidness, the paralysis moving into her face and mouth, turning her streaming hair to stone. The last thing she does is scream, scream into the wind where nobody can hear her anymore

By sunrise, there is silence

IV.

So what of the sea maiden and her Prince? How does the tale end? When are all reconciled, the wicked punished, and the strong and virtuous rewarded? Unfortunately, that is all the tale there is to tell There is no moral lesson, no precept of wit, no wise warning to be had tonight This is merely a story, simple and unadorned

There is one more thing that can be said, however, of the Sea God's daughter and the Prince and Another, wicked captain made wickeder by his cunning and magic, singer of songs that turn flesh to wood and scale to flesh

Eventually, the man perished, old and no less wicked The Prince had taken another wife, having given his up for fled, and from the day Another heard that news he stroked the figurehead of *Ocean's Daughter* every morning, whispered in its ear tales and news from lands afar He died rich and mysterious as the day he was born, soul cast to the sea with his desiccated body

His ship was given to a nephew from his home city, the city where magic was circumscribed and the Sea God's powers scorned. The nephew was not a seafaring man *Ocean's Daughter* was sold for scrap, the figurehead fitted to another ship, and another, and another Each owner commented on its remarkable beauty, the classicism of the style, the detail with which the traditional open mouth was rendered.

One night there was a shipwreck, the kind caused by poor piloting and too much drink and sharp rocks off a tropical coast The ship was smashed into pieces, along with all her crew

When the sun rose, the figurehead had washed up on the beach. A poet, wandering hand in hand with his wife, found it lodged on the sand. He stared into its salt-stained eyes and saw the ocean, the peninsula's golden parties, seven days and nights of transformation like a creeping disease. He saw the lines of her Prince's body and Another's hot, coal-black eyes, the caress of the waves on her cheeks, and felt pain and sadness like never before

He looked into his wife's eyes, beautiful black-light eyes that had almost lost their spark in days gone by, and squeezed her hand tight

When his kisses had dried on her body, the sand dried beneath her welcoming hips, he wandered off to his study murmuring lines to himself in pentameter, tested them for rhythm and scansion and the sweetness that had earned him his lady's love He wrote sonnets every day and night for a hundred days after that, working in fits and starts and spotting the pages with tears shed in private. The very first of them he pinned to the figurehead, now propped up against the side of the beach house where he and his wife made love again through long nights

Legends sprung up around the figurehead: all false, of course, because everyone knows that women carved of wood and scale and flesh do not truly speak But despite that it was whispered that the poet's carved woman wept real tears every winter, and for seven nights of every year, if one knew enough to listen to the wind and waves, recite a story that began and ended with a sonnet

Esta es la historia de la muchacha de madera

This is the story of the girl made of wood. ❧

THE CHIVALRY SPORTS

Renaissance

catalog magazine

Shop Online or request a 64-page catalog today!

Call Now 1-800-730-KING

For all of your Medieval, Renaissance and Fantasy adventure.

High Quality Men's and Women's Clothing

Lots of accessories

▲ Practical Hand & a Half Sword
Un-edged and Unpointed for sport combat and re-enactment. Riveted full tang. Authentic styling. Wooden scabbard with steel details. 34" long blade.
WAS-10017
$129.95

▶ 10" Eating Daggers
White bone or black antler hilt with brass crossguard. Stainless steel leaf shaped blade, very sharp. Each comes with a leather scabbard
PCT-2003 **$15.95**

▶ Aowyn Surcoat
Sleeveless overgown with scoop neckline. Cotton twill. Colors: Red, spruce green, black or tan. Sizes V/S, M/L, X/2X
CHI-1056 **$49.95**

GREAT ONLINE SALES EVERY MONTH DON'T MISS OUT!

BIG ARMOR & WEAPONS SELECTION

Tableware & drinking vessels

SCA fight-legal armor, helmets, rattan, basket hilts and more

▲ Aowyn Chemise
Romantic lightweight, sheer chemise with long flowing sleeves that are open to the elbow. Comes with short cords for the sleeves and a long cord for the belt. 100% cotton, takes dye well. Colors: White, natural, or black. Sizes V/S, M/L, X/2X
CHI-1054 **$69.95**

◀ Big 24 oz. Wooden Mugs
Finished with a leakproof food-grade epoxy resin on the inside so that you can use them with hot or cold liquids. Chose oak, walnut or cherry wood with contrasting handle and base.
DON001 plain, no rope **$30.00**
DON002 with rope trim **$35.00**

▲ Traveller's Robe
For monk or space knight. High quality robe made of washable wool blend in brown or black. Hidden pockets in side seam. Front opens like a coat.
CHI-5027 regular length **$194.95**
CHI-5027 tall length **$199.95**

▲ Men & Women's Fringe Suede Leather Boots
Knee-high lace-up boots with bonded hard soles for comfort, style and long wear. See more styles online.
MTK-1922 brown **MTK-1929** black Men's sizes 6-13 **$64.95**
MTK-1422 brown **MTK-1429** black Women's sizes 4-10 **$59.95**

All prices are subject to change. Prices quoted do not include shipping and handling. Place your order by phone for fastest service

THE CHAMBER OF FORGETTING

BY SARAH PRINEAS • ILLUSTRATION BY HUGO MARTIN

SOMEONE IS SHOUTING.

"Dammit, Truax, how long has he been in there?" snaps the voice. "You leave him in too long, he's likely to forget how to breathe. We're not done with him yet. Get him out! Now!"

Another voice replies, defensive, whining.

Rough hands grab his arms and pull him out of the darkness, from the dank stone floor he's been lying on for how long? He doesn't know. His entire life, maybe.

The hands drop him onto another stone floor, one crossed with squares of sunlight let in through windows in the high walls. He blinks in the light, blinded, and tears rush from his eyes. Someone moans.

A circle of frightened faces surrounds him. Soldiers. Two bear drawn swords. At a barked command, four others grasp his arms and legs and pin him to the floor. He feels their hands shaking, smells fear in their acrid sweat.

Another face appears above him: grey-bearded, iron-eyed. This one is the leader, he knows instinctively. The one who had shouted, the angry one.

"Mattamdar," the leader says. His voice is grating, strong. "Do you understand me?"

If you remember your past, are you condemned to relive it? If you forget who you were, can you know who you should be?

He stares at the leader but cannot speak. Cannot open his mouth to answer, and knows no answer to give.

The leader's gloved hand flashes up, crashes down across his face. The blow knocks his head sideways, his vision wobbles, shards of light dance across the ceiling. Darkness comes again. He embraces it.

He wakes to pain. Someone is moaning again.

"Be quiet," a voice says. A woman. "I'm almost done."

Her voice is not gentle, but her hands are as they stitch the cut on his cheek. She finishes and bathes the cut with herbed water; he smells the pungency of arrowleaf, feels its sting in the wound.

So, he knows about wounds.

He opens his eyes. Above his head, he sees a whitewashed ceiling crossed with heavy wooden beams. A new place, then. He rolls his head on the pillow, looking for the voice, wanting to hear it again.

A woman sits beside the bed. She is old and stern looking and wears a gray robe and a white wimple that hides her hair. She sees him looking and flinches, then glances over her shoulder. Behind her is an open door, he can see, in the larger room outside, rows of beds, patients, another gray-robed, wimpled nurse.

"Nurse," the old woman calls sharply.

The nurse, younger, frightened, appears in the doorway. "Yes, Mother?"

"He is awake. Fetch Captain Benedic immediately, and call in the guard."

The young nurse bows her head, obedient, and hurries away.

The old woman, the "Mother," frowns, then returns to her duty. She picks up his hand and inspects the bandages that cover his fingers. Her touch, though gentle, elicits pain. He makes a sound and her scowl deepens.

She sets down his hand and raises the sheet to examine the bandages wrapped around his chest. "Do you remember anything?" she asks.

He stares at her, having no words with which to answer.

"I don't like this," she mutters. Her fingers probe. "Does this hurt?"

Yes, he wants to say.

She shakes her head, her frown deepening. "This new magic. I don't like it." She grasps his hand and holds it up, so he can see it. "Do you see this?" She points to his bandaged fingers, to the bandages around his wrists, to his wrapped ribs. "You were interrogated."

Yes, of course. He knows of interrogations.

There is a commotion in the outer room, the urgent sound of soldiers' footsteps. The Mother sets his hand down. "I'm not supposed to be telling you this. But I don't like any of it."

She picks up the rag and is wiping the cut on his cheek when a tall figure darkens the doorway. It steps into the room; she puts down the rag and gets to her feet. "Captain Benedic."

The man steps over to the bed, looks down at the Mother's patient. It is the leader from the stone room, from before. "Mattamdar." The man glances over his shoulder. "Thank you, Honored Mother. I will speak to him now."

He doesn't want the Mother to go, to leave him with the leader. But she picks up the bowl of herbed water and the rag and goes away.

The captain sits in the Mother's chair and examines Mattamdar carefully, running hard gray eyes from his head to his feet and back again. Like the Mother, he lifts the sheet and looks at the bandages around Mattamdar's ribs.

At last, Benedic speaks. "Not feeling too good, are you?"

He closes his eyes. Go away.

There is a sharp pain from his fingers, and he can't help crying out and opening his eyes. Benedic drops his hand and regards him grimly. "Just know this, Mattamdar. I'm not finished with you yet. You still have a reckoning to pay."

The Mother appears in the doorway, her gaze flicking between him and the captain. She says nothing, but her presence is enough. The captain stands, still staring down. "I will speak to you, Honored Mother." He takes her arm and they leave together.

After that, the Mother doesn't come again.

When he is strong enough to walk, they blindfold him, chain his hands behind, and take him away from the sickroom. Unspeaking soldiers hurry him down two flights of stairs, across an open, dusty space, then up another set of winding stairs. Rough hands unbind him and send him, stumbling, into a new place.

He removes the blindfold and surveys the room. The four walls are stone, the ceiling and floor wooden. One small, barred window is set high in the wall. A simple bed sits against one wall. There is a pisspot beneath it. He looks down at himself. They have dressed him in brown trousers and a loose woolen jerkin. His feet are bare. His skin, he thinks, is a little lighter than theirs, but perhaps that is due to his long confinement in the sickroom. He holds up scarred fingers, examines them. The knuckles, broken during his interrogation, have healed, but not well. The hands were once strong and slender, he guesses, but now the fingers are lumpy, stiff. Other scars track white and jagged across his belly and at his wrists; he bends and turns, feeling the faint ache of broken ribs, almost healed.

Later, he finds that his meals come in through a slot in the door. If he's not there to catch the tray, they shove it in and his food drops onto the floor. The food is simple and soft: potatoes, brown bread, water. They give him no fork or knife to eat it with. The pisspot is collected and emptied once a day by two guards, one armed with a halberd, the other with a sword. They make him stand against a wall while one sidles in, grabs the pot, empties it, and flings it back in again. He can hear the hands that hold the keys shaking as they relock the door.

Many days pass. It is high summer, and the room swelters. The window is too high to reach, even when he stands on the bed. At the sickroom they shaved him, to keep the wounds on his face clean, but here they do not, and his beard comes in, sparse and itchy. He does not know how to ask permission to bathe; in any case, the men who bring the food and collect the pisspot do not speak to him. He grows sick of his own smell, of the taste of rancid teeth in his mouth, of his clothing, stiff with his own sweat.

He paces. Two and a half steps across, two and a half back. Words start to rattle around in his head like dice in a cup. He moves his mouth to say them, but no sound comes out. He stops eating the food they bring him.

It is a hot day, and he has removed his filthy jerkin. He has paced the room since before dawn, two and a half steps across, two and a half back.

The keys jangle in the lock and the door swings open. To his surprise, it is not the pisspot guards, but the captain. He stands, large, in the doorway, his nose wrinkled. "Empty the pisspot," he orders. The frightened guards scurry in, obeying, one panning Mattamdar to the wall with the halberd while the other fetches the pot from beneath the bed. As they scurry out, Benedic stops one with a heavy hand. "Stay alert out there. Come immediately if I call."

"Yes, sir," they stammer, and rush away.

"Sit on the bed," Benedic orders.

Mattamdar obeys, pulling up his legs and wrapping his arms around his knees. He cannot take his eyes from the captain, it has been so long since anyone has spoken to him.

Benedic leans against one wall, arms crossed, a sword heavy at his waist, one knife in his boot, another one spring-loaded up his sleeve. He looks relaxed, but he is not. His iron-gray eyes never leave his prisoner. "What do you remember?"

Mattamdar shakes his head. Nothing.

"Well then, what do you know? Can you speak yet?"

He nods. He opens his mouth but nothing comes out.

The captain looks impatient, as if he will leave.

Mattamdar doesn't want the captain to go away, to leave him alone. "I—I can speak now," he blurts out. The voice surprises him. It is too light, it speaks with a different accent than the captain's. "My name is Mattamdar."

"Yes, I told you that. What else?"

He looks down at his hands. "I was . . . tortured."

The captain straightens, interested. "You remember your interrogation?"

He shakes his head. No.

"What else?" The captain shifts but his gaze remains steady.

"I am a prisoner."

"And you don't know why."

"No. But—" He pauses. Benedic raises his eyebrows, and Mattamdar continues. "You believe that I am a danger to you."

A knock on the door interrupts them. Without removing his eyes from his prisoner, the captain calls out, "What is it?"

A mouth appears at the slot in the door. "Just checking that everything is all right, Captain, as you ordered." It is one of the pisspot

guards. "Should we open the door?"

"In a moment, Derran. I'm almost finished here."

"Yes sir." The mouth disappears.

The captain frowns, places a hand on the pommel of his sword. "Know this, Mattamdar. I do not *believe* you are a danger. I *know* it. As does everyone here." He pauses, shifts again. "The guards say you've stopped eating."

Mattamdar nods. The captain's gaze is too piercing; he lowers his eyes, rests forehead on knees.

"When you are brought food, you will eat it. Understand?"

Without lifting his head, Mattamdar nods.

"Good." A jingle of mail, a brisk step, and Benedic is gone.

The next time they bring him food, he eats it.

A few days later, without warning, the pisspot guards bring him soap and water and a change of clothes, depositing it all in a heap inside the door then locking it hastily behind them. Mattamdar examines what they've brought: plain shirt and trousers, boots, and a sky-blue tunic. Like the one Benedic was wearing, before. A short time later after he has bathed and dressed and cleaned his teeth as best he can with a finger, the door swings open again and three guards enter. Moving swiftly, they pin him against the wall and chain his hands and feet. He does not resist. They sit him on the bed, their hands heavy on his shoulders.

"Send in the barber," one shouts.

He almost laughs. Such a fuss for a haircut and shave.

The barber, small and shaking, does his work and scuttles from the room, followed by the guards. They leave Mattamdar bound.

An hour later, there is a commotion at the door. He recognizes Benedic's step. A moment later, the captain is in the room, brisk, hurried, wearing a sky-blue dress uniform, but armed as usual. "All right, Derran, unchain his feet." The younger of the two guards jumps to obey. They pull him out into a short corridor of whitewashed stone. Before he has a chance to look around, they rush on, dragging him down the twisting stairway and into a wide, dusty courtyard, surrounded on four sides by high walls. On each corner of the court yard stands a squat, square tower; his cell is in one of them. They march through a gate in the wall and into a side door of the massive castle that looms over their heads like a storm cloud. One corridor follows another in a blur until they arrive at a wide double door flanked by halberd-bearing guards.

"By order of the king," Benedic snaps. The guards step aside. They go in.

The room within is long but mostly empty. At the other end, a few people cluster around an ornate chair, they all look up as the doors crash open.

Benedic curtly orders the guards to remain by the doors, he marches his prisoner to the throne, their feet echoing on the polished marble floor. A stout man with thinning black hair, wearing a heavy golden chain across his barrel chest, sits on the throne, talking. His voice is bluff, hearty. Listening to him are a thin, nervous-looking young man in a brown robe and sandals and an ornately dressed man with a black mustache. They break off their conversation and stare as Benedic and Mattamdar reach the throne.

Benedic bows. "Your Majesty. You asked to see the prisoner." He nods again, stiffly. "Mage. Lord Everard." The captain is not happy to be here, Mattamdar realizes.

The three stare at the prisoner, the king leaning forward on the throne, hands on his knees. Mattamdar gazes back. The king wears an eating knife at his belt; the thin man is unarmed; the dandy wears a narrow, useless sword at his side.

"This is the prisoner you wished to see, sir." Benedic repeats.

The king squints, shortsighted. "Bring him a bit closer, Captain."

Benedic grasps Mattamdar's arms and, holding him firmly, places him before the king. Mattamdar forces himself to keep still as the king, foul breathed, leans forward and examines him from head to foot.

The king sits back, his mouth open, eyes wide. "*This* is Mattamdar? But he's just a ..."

Benedic pulls Mattamdar back a step but does not release him. "I know he looks young, Sire, and innocent. But believe me, he is not. We all know very well that he is not. Never forget that this is Mattamdar, Sire, sent by the Salvandi. Your brother's killer and the killer of countless more. The information we got out of him during his interrogation indicates that he was sent to assassinate you and your family as well, Your Majesty."

"Me? Why would he do that? Is that why he is here? He is an assassin?"

Yes, of course," the king is saying. "They start training them as babies, don't they, Everard?"

Lord Everard bows before he replies. "I hear, Sire, that a Salvandi assassin kills his first man before he is ten years of age. They breed them to kill with no consideration of their own lives." His eyes are cold as they examine Mattamdar. "I am sure, as he failed to complete his mission, that this one is supposed to be dead."

"Is that so? Succeed or the mission or die, eh?" The king strokes his chin. "Whose conceit was that, having him wear a guard uniform?"

"Mine, sir," pipes the thin man. The mage.

"What's the idea, Truax?"

"To demonstrate how completely effectively the chamber functions, sir." His voice is precise, pedantic. He is proud of his accomplishment, the *chamber*, as he calls it. "The old Mattamdar was the Salvandi's most skilled assassin, our direst enemy. Here you have the new Mattamdar. His past is a blank. We give him the only memories he has."

Beside him, Benedic sighs. "Excuse me Your Majesty. Mage Truax. We should not be speaking of these matters before the prisoner."

The king ignores him. "Well done, Truax." He eyes Mattamdar, squinting. "Well, let's see what he has to say for himself. What do you have to say for yourself, boy?"

He can think of nothing. Except, how many people have I killed? Why did I do it? Why am I here?

"Sullen whelp, isn't he?" the king says.

"Typical Salvandi," says the smooth one, Everard. "Give him a cuff, Captain Benedi."

"I think, Your Majesty, that if you ask him a direct question, he'll answer." Benedic's ...

"Hmmm." The king strokes his chin. "All right. Why were you sent here?"

Mattamdar feels a nudge from Benedic. "I ... I don't know."

"Sire," Benedic prompts.

The king wears an eating knife at his belt; the thin man is unarmed; the dandy wears a narrow, useless sword at his side.

"Sire," he repeats.

The king purses fat lips. "All right, then. What was your mission when you were sent here?"

He shakes his head. "I don't know. Sire."

"Where were you trained?"

"I don't know. Sire."

The king laughs and claps his hands, a child with a new toy. "We could keep him and send him out as our own assassin."

Benedic frowns. "I would not advise that, Sire."

"Why not?" The king turns to the mage. "What do you think, Truax?

What a thing to spring on the Salvandi, eh? Send this lad in there with a few knives and poison darts and see what happens."

"Sire," Benedic interrupts. "I apologize if I seem out of line. But are you suggesting *arming* him?"

"Well!" the king sputters, then reconsiders. "Well, perhaps not, perhaps not. Perhaps you are right, Captain." He places fat hands on the arms of his chair. "But he is obviously harmless now."

The mage nods eagerly in agreement.

"No, Sire, not harmless," Benedic corrects. "Never harmless."

Mattamdar can see that the king does not like to be corrected.

"The question is, Sire, what are we going to do with this Salvandi?" Everard's gaze on Mattamdar is chilling.

The king's face goes blank. "Well—"

"If I might make a suggestion, Sire?" Everard says.

The king nods eagerly. "Of course, of course. Do go on."

Everard smiles. "The Salvandi delegation arrives in less than two weeks. We must keep the assassin alive until then. As a

Today the air is sparkling and cool, and the view spreads out before them: rich farmland, orchards, a lazy river. In the distance, harsh, forbidding mountains tipped with snow.

demonstration."

"A demonstration of what, Everard?"

"What will the Salvandi think, Sire, seeing their top assassin, Mattamdar, running tame in our court, wearing our colors! What a coup!"

Benedic puts his hands on Mattamdar's shoulders, pulls him back a step. "Sire, with your permission?"

The king glances away from the smiling Everard. With a wave of his hand, he dismisses the captain. "That's a wonderful idea, Everard," he says.

With a jerk, Benedic pulls Mattamdar away. "That was more than you needed to know, my lad," he mutters angrily. He rushes Mattamdar to the door, shoves him at the guards. "Get him out of here," he orders. "Back to his cell."

Days pass. In the cell, he paces. An assassin, he thinks. I was sent to assassinate the king and his family, by a people called the Salvandi. I killed the king's brother. Two and a half steps across, two and a half back. Assassin. Salvandi. Countless others.

At last, Benedic comes, angry. Mattamdar hears him outside, cursing the guards, then hears the irritated jangle of keys in the lock. The door flies open and the captain strides into the room.

"Dammit, I should kill you myself and be done with this farce." His eyes harden as they take in his prisoner. "Our pet Salvandi assassin. I don't like it." He paces to the door. "Derran!"

The younger guard rushes to the doorway, his sword half drawn. "Yes, sir!"

"The king has ordered that Mattamdar be given the run of the castle."

"Sir?"

"You heard me. And I hereby order that a guard be with him at all times." He points.

Derran's eyes widen. "Me, sir?"

Benedic sighs. "Yes, you, Derran."

"But, sir—"

"Just do it, boy," the captain snaps. He turns his grim gaze to Mattamdar. "And you. The king is apparently blind to what you are. But I am not. At the first sign of trouble, I will kill you. Do you understand?"

Mattamdar nods. The king is a fool, he understands. But Captain Benedic is not.

Mattamdar is not sure what to do with his new freedom. He pauses on the threshold of his cell, Derran pale and quivering behind him. The castle, he decides. During the next week, he explores it from top to bottom, finding that he has no trouble remembering every detail.. entrances, easy exits, outer walls covered with ivy ladders, places of strength, places of weakness.

At first his guard, Derran, blanches every time Mattamdar looks at him, and walks one wary step behind. One morning, though, the guard steps up beside Mattamdar as he pauses in the cell doorway deciding what to explore next.

"You want to see the kitchens?" Derran asks with a nervous glance.

Mattamdar nods.

"My mum's an under-cook," Derran says proudly. "She said she wouldn't mind if we stopped in."

Mattamdar pauses a moment to find his voice. "She—you—wouldn't be frightened?"

"Of you?"

"I am Mattamdar," he says quietly.

Derran shakes his head, confused. "I know, but—" He shrugs. "You're different now. I'm not afraid of you anymore."

Maybe you should be, Mattamdar thinks, but does not say.

From then on, Derran walks beside Mattamdar, talking easily, pointing things out: armory, kitchens, this is where we dump the garbage, this is the only well within the walls, here's the portcullis. As they walk, people shy from them with frightened eyes. Servants duck their heads and rush away. Ladies pull in their skirts like salted snails, men place their hands on sword pommels and glare.

One morning, Mattamdar decides to visit the Mother.

"She's probably at the infirmary," chatters Derran as they walk down a corridor. "She's lost favor lately with the king, but people always need an infirmary."

They enter a place he remembers, a long room lined with beds. A few gray-robed, wimpled nurses glance up in surprise and one rushes out, in search of instruction.

A short time later, the Mother appears. As before, she is grim-faced, harsh-voiced. "In here," she orders. They enter a room containing a desk, two chairs, two shelves of books, a holy symbol hangs on the wall. Derran stands by the door.

She points to a chair and Mattamdar sits. She sits behind her desk. "What do you want?"

"I—" Now that he is here, he is not sure why he has come.

"Well?" Impatient.

He finds his voice. "Why did you tell me things when I was here?"

She frowns. "Don't think I told you because I like you, or care for you. I told you because I don't like what they're doing."

"New magic."

"You remember. Yes."

"And the mage?"

"Truax." She falls silent. Her gaze drifts past Mattamdar to fix on the religious symbol on the wall behind him. "He's a genius, by all accounts. But he thinks in terms of progress, never counting the human cost. He experiments on people and calls them 'subjects.' And now this."

"The chamber," Mattamdar prompts.

"Mm. From what I understand, he has devised a spell that penetrates the mind of the . . . subject . . . and takes away his memories."

She shakes her head. "I'm not a practitioner of magic. I don't really understand how it works. I don't know how he determines the degree of memory loss, leaving you with enough memory to survive, but not enough to—" Her gaze moves from beyond Mattamdar to focus on his face. He sees her remember who he is and what he has done. "Why am I telling you this?"

Because I was a "subject," Mattamdar thinks.

She frowns. "That is all I will say about it." Her frown deepens; brackets frame her mouth. "Now go away."

He stands.

"Wait. Let me look at your hands."

He circles the desk and holds out his hands. She examines them, turning them over, gently squeezing the knuckles to see how they've healed. She shakes her head. "You'll be crippled with arthritis before you're forty, boy."

"Matt," he says, surprising himself.

"What?" She looks up, startled.

"My name is Matt."

The next day, when Derran comes, Matt asks to see Captain Benedict.

The captain? Well, I suppose we could ask, but he's not going to like it.

They find the captain in the barracks. The few off-duty soldiers stiffen and get to their feet when Matt and Derran enter the room. "Captain!" one calls. Matt counts the uniformed men, noting the condition of their equipment.

Benedic emerges from a doorway at the other end of the room. Seeing them, he scowls. "What the hell were you thinking, Derran, bringing him here?"

"I'm sorry, sir. Matt asked to see you."

"Matt, is it?"

The guard begins to explain.

"Never mind." The captain comes to them in the doorway. "Wait here, Derran." He takes Matt's arm and marches him, in silence, from the barracks. He leads them down a corridor and up a winding set of stairs, emerging on the walkway atop the castle wall. Matt has been here before, but that day was clouded. Today the air is sparkling and cool, and the view spreads out before them: rich farmland, orchards, a lazy river. In the distance, harsh, forbidding mountains tipped with snow. They stand in silence for a time, leaning against the battlements, looking out.

At last, Benedic speaks, half to himself, half to Matt. "You've probably figured out that the king is not a military man. He's in love with everything new. New magic. New ideas. Making peace with the Salvandi. Which is not possible. But he's got to try everything once."

"I am Salvandi."

"Yes." They stand in silence, watching the sky, the river, until Benedic speaks again. "The king is spending a fortune building a summer palace for the queen. You see why that's a problem?"

Matt nods. A palace is not a castle; a country at war does not build palaces.

"So the war has to end," Benedic says. In the distance, a black bird wheels above a field then plunges down upon the prey it's been hunting.

"Captain Benedic," Matt says at last.

"What."

"I don't believe that I am an assassin."

The captain glances at him, then away. "You are."

Matt shakes his head.

"You killed four of my guards with your bare hands during your second escape attempt. I saw you do it."

Matt looks at his hands, broken, ugly. If the captain says it is so, then it is so.

Benedic is staring at Matt's hands too. He shakes his head, frowning, as if banishing a thought he doesn't like. "Mattamdar. Matt. How were the men armed, in the barracks?"

"The man by the door had a throwing knife in his boot. The two playing dice had belt knives; the one with the mustache was wearing a chain mail vest and had his sword on the floor by his feet."

"Could you have taken them?"

"Yes," he answers, without thinking.

"You see?" Benedic straightens and looks grimly at Matt. "You don't remember. But your body remembers."

Later, long after his dinner has been shoved through the slot in the door, Matt paces, thinking. Is a man the sum of his experiences? His memories? His hands ache, and he feels again the Mother's gentle touch as she turned them over in her own. Yes, the body remembers.

The next day, Derran has been replaced with a new guard, an older one who does not chatter but walks behind Matt, alert, a hand on his sword. When Matt heads for the armory, the guard blocks his way. "Not there," he orders. They walk for a short time then return to the cell.

After that, Matt walks where the guard tells him to walk. Until, one afternoon, they come to a long corridor with doors leading off. A woman on hands and knees is scrubbing the floor; a knot of laughing ladies enters by one door.

His body sees its chance. As he and the guard pass the ladies, Matt darts behind them and out one of the doors. Behind him, he hears the guard slip, crash to the wet floor, hears the ladies titter and shriek. He runs through another door, then another, down a dark corridor and around a corner where he leans against a wall, panting. He laughs under his breath. Benedic will catch him soon, but he's free for a while.

He makes his way through the castle, easily avoiding observation, until he comes to a door leading outside, a door even Derran would not let him open.

It opens into a walled garden, a place honey-gold in the afternoon sunlight. A stream runs across it and under the walls; there are apple trees heavy with fruit and the lazy drone of satiated bees. Autumn flowers, gold, rich brown, orange, dot the grass. The air is warm and soft with the scent of living things. No one is there.

Stepping lightly, Matt crosses to the stream, where he sits. Shiny fish are swimming in the water; he watches them drift along with the lazy current, then twitch their tails to propel themselves upstream again. A light, fragrant breeze touches his face. He is very tired and the spell of the garden is a strong one, he leans back on the grass and falls asleep.

Something tickles his ear. He jerks awake and sits up, dazzled in the light. A black-braided girl leaps away from him, waving a leaf, laughing.

"See, Nona, he really is awake!" she shouts.

Behind her, a plump, unarmed woman settles herself on a grassy bench and smiles benevolently. A much smaller child, hardly more than a baby, sits at her feet, gazing at him with solemn eyes. "You watch yourself, my girl. He might not like it." She speaks more directly, to Matt. "Don't mind her, youngster. She just likes to tease."

"I don't mind," Matt says.

"Oh, good!" The girl laughs again and dances up to Matt. "Come and play with me."

"Well ..." He glances at the girl's minder.

"If you don't mind, young sir," the nurse says, pulling a bundle of cloth, a needle, and thread from a basket.

"All right. What do I do?"

The girl looks at him, curious. "Just play. I'll show you how. My name is Felice. What's yours?"

"Matt."

She points to his feet. "First, you have to take your boots off." He does so, then stands. She is staring. "What happened to your hands?"

He glances at them, sees how they might look to a child. "Nothing. That's just how they are."

She shrugs. Then gives him a conspiratorial look. "I want to build

a dam."

"All right."

They spend the next hour splashing in the stream, moving moss-covered rocks, falling into the water and climbing out, chasing the fish and not catching them.

At last, the girl is tired and they go, dripping, to the nurse.

"Oh my, oh my, little girl," she chides, her face glowing in the golden light. "What a mess you've made." She pats the grass beside her. "Come and sit down, sweetheart, and I'll give you a treat."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful," Felice says with a contented sigh, settling beside Nona, "if we could build a perfect dam, and the garden filled up with water and washed us away?"

The woman laughs. Matt sits down at her feet, beside the baby.

"D'you want a treat, Matt?" Felice sits next to him and holds out her hand.

Matt examines what she offers. Sticky brown cubes. He takes one, puts it into his mouth, cautious.

Beside him, Felice laughs merrily. "Did you see his face, Nona?" She smiles at Matt. "Didn't you ever have treats before, Matt?"

He shakes his head, holding the sweetness in his mouth for as long as he can.

The little boy puts a finger into his mouth and stares at Matt, drooling slightly.

"He's teething again, poor lad," Nona explains. The baby leans against her legs, and she places her hand atop his head.

At that moment their peace is shattered when the door crashes open and Captain Benedic and three guards rush into the garden, swords drawn. Felice shrieks, jumps into Matt's arms; the baby begins to wail. Benedic sees them and waves his soldiers to a halt.

"Come here, lad," Benedic says. His voice is controlled; he is trying not to frighten the children.

Setting the girl gently aside, Matt stands up. He crosses the grass to stand, barefoot, before the captain.

Benedic lowers his sword until its tip rests over Matt's heart. "I told you, my lad, that I would kill you if you stepped out of line."

Matt nods, unable to meet the captain's eyes, unable to speak. He wonders if Benedic will kill him here, in front of the children, or wait until later. He focuses on the tip of the sword, watches as it presses through the thin linen of his shirt to nick the skin, sees a bead of blood, blotted, spreading. After a moment, the sword is pulled away. Matt looks up to see Benedic staring at him, his expression troubled. At Benedic's signal, the soldiers grasp Matt and rush him from the garden, through the castle, and to his cell, where he is locked in.

For a week, no one comes. The guards do their duty, delivering food and emptying the pisspot, but no one speaks to him. Felice is the princess, Matt comes to understand, the daughter of the king's young queen, and the boy must be a little prince. He thinks of the warm garden, the girl's laughter. The baby's head, soft, downy, like a fresh peach. He—the prisoner—was sent to kill them. He thinks of biting into a peach, the juice running down his chin.

Finally, they deliver his boots, allow him to wash. They chain his hands and take him to see Benedic.

"I didn't know who they were," Matt tries to explain.

"Shut up." The captain paces. His office is austere, holding only a desk, one shelf of account books, another of maps. "You are becoming a problem." He glares at Matt, turns at the wall, takes two steps back across the room. "No. You were always a problem, and now the problem has gotten worse. It was an unbelievably stupid thing to do."

"I'm sorry."

"Just shut up. I don't know what to do with you." He continues to pace, muttering. "All right." He has decided something, he stops pacing and sits behind his desk, unrolls a large square of paper. "Look."

Matt crosses to the desk, leans over, awkward in the chains, to see. It is a map. Words are written on it, but he cannot read them. "What is it?"

The captain points with one strong, blunt finger to a vast blue region. "This is Velorin." He looks up. "This kingdom. Where we are now." Matt nods. The finger moves to the mountains, points out a much smaller country, in red. "Salvandi. Where you come from. There are some things you need to know. First, the Velorin and the Salvandi have been at war, off and on, for two hundred years. Back then, the two countries were about the same size." He frowns. "As you can see, the wars have not gone well for your people." Abruptly, he rolls up the map and puts it away.

Matt thinks of the mountains he saw from the castle walls. Harsh, forbidding, he had thought then.

"Second," the captain continues, "is this. The king, tired of war and ready for something new, has requested that a Salvandi delegation, under flag of truce, come here, to the castle, to discuss peace." He scrubs his hands through his gray hair. "This is the part I don't like. They—the king, Everard, and the mage, among others—want to use you against the Salvandi, to demoralize them." He looks up. "You heard that, when you met the king."

Matt nods.

"Their plan was they would set up a little tableau with their tame Salvandi assassin. The king's daughter and son, maybe a game with ball and sticks. You see what I'm saying?"

"Like in the garden."

"Exactly. The king just happens to pass by with the Salvandi del-

The figure steps away, pushes back the black hood. In the darkness, Matt can barely make out a pale, sharp-featured face that he doesn't recognize.

egation. 'Oh look,' he says. 'There is your assassin, Mattamdar.' He makes such a good murder for the children.'" Benedic gives a snort of derision. "The Salvandi, of course, don't notice the guards behind the trees. It never would have worked." He shrugs. "At any rate, it doesn't matter now. The queen has heard about your escape, your adventure with her two darlings. She's screaming for your blood." He frowns. "As an added complication, the Salvandi arrived early this morning."

Matt thinks over what the captain has said and done. "Benedic," he asks at last, "Why didn't you kill me, in the garden?"

The captain looks at Matt, then down at the map on his desk. "Maybe I should have," he says quietly, as if talking to himself. "But I won't kill you now. Not if I can help it."

"Why?"

"Because I'm an idiot. And," he nods toward Matt's hands "because I'm responsible for that."

Matt clenches his manacled hands into fists, feeling how their deadly strength has been broken. They are weak now, and they ache almost constantly.

Matt finds himself thinking of the garden. Before, his hands would have killed Felice and her brother. "It's all right," he whispers.

Benedic looks at him, frowning. Then he sighs and nods, understanding.

They both flinch when the door behind Matt opens. It is Derran. "What is it?" the captain asks.

The guard's eyes dart from his captain, to Matt, and back again. "Sorry, sir. The chamberlain sends his respects, says the talks with the Salvandi delegation are about to begin."

Continued on page 94

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

KICK-ASS
HEROINES

ALPHA-MALE
HEROES

AND ALL THE
SIZZLE
YOU'D EXPECT
FROM BOTH

The World's largest e-publisher of
Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy

ELLORA'S CAVE
PUBLISHING, INC.

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS titles NOW AVAILABLE at:

BORDERS
BOOKS MUSIC MOVIES CAFE

Waldenbooks
BRENTANO'S

WWW.ELLORASCAVE.COM

THE WILD MAN

To shake off memory and humanity, and live as the beasts of the forests—for some it is punishment, for others a blessing.

Guyn ap Nudd carried away Creiddylad by force and captured Nuython and Kyledyr the Wild, his son When Arthur heard of this he went north ...

—from the Dark Age Welsh text, *Culhwch and Olwen*

You ask how I found the wild man? The one who was "nine times wilder than the wildest beast?" Well, maybe there are worse stories. But this one makes my blood run cold even now. I would have given the whole apple harvest of my kingdom never to have known it.

Some blame the wild man's madness on the cruelties of Gwyn ap Nudd. Gwyn was but distant kin to me. Many said that his troublesome, quicksilver nature was the result of his mother having rested too long in the shadow of a certain hawthorn tree. Whether she embraced some faery man as twilight fell or drank a draught from the spring that rose beneath the tree, I cannot say. Whatever his conception, Gwyn lacked his right share of human compassion. Even as a child I remember his strange delight in cutting open a live hare to see what was within while I ran away to stop my ears against its shrieks. Many have said the wild man's madness was the woman's fault. You see, if Creiddylad the Beautiful had gone straight to the house of her betrothed, she would have been safely wed to the dull and predictable Gwythyr, the son of my most trusted counselor, and none of this trouble would have started. But the treacherous Gwyn stole her away on her wedding night. As a result, the whole of the northwest was in uproar from the Ribble to the Wall, and I must go north to quell it if Britain was to have any peace, for Gwythyr and Gwyn were tearing the country to pieces between them. Now the news came that, not content with robbing the bridegroom of his bride, Gwyn had overcome the army that Gwythyr led to bring her back and now held the flower of northern nobility in captivity.

By Caitlín Matthews
Illustration by Paul Lee

I should never have had to come north in the first place, what with a wave of Saxons mustering in the south, but it is a ruler's duty to keep the peace and this was a family matter So I took a punitive force with me to rescue the prisoners, leaving the bulk of the army behind under the redoubtable Cai to defend our shores

After many day's hard riding, we encamped near Coed Brect. As the men foraged for food and hunted for small game, the boys were set to fetch water and gather wood to fuel the fire against the coming darkness. Suddenly, young Idwal, his freckled face blanched with fear, burst out of the forest crying out that there was a tree spirit As he was not usually one to be frightened, we loosed the dogs Taking up the sword I'd been burnishing, I followed after

The dogs set up a savage barking where some dead fallen trees had been dragged together to form a miserable shelter We peered trustlessly into the impenetrable shadows crowding the gloom until some light was brought Fearless Gereint grumblingly thrust the brand toward the heart of the darkness, muttering a series of threats. He was always angry when unled

Flickering pine fire sputtered and crept into the shadows, which seemed to gather together under its assault. Something unfurled itself and dropped. Crawling out from inside a hollow trunk like a long beetle, a figure of terror lay upon the ground, arms and legs flailing as if to fend off blows, woodlouse-like unable to roll upright onto all fours

"No harm will befall you if you speak your name quickly," I cried out, sharper with fear than I had meant, for though it was clear that this creature could do us no physical harm, you never know what wicked spells the wild folk of the forest might loose on us

Even the most hardened drew back when we began to make sense of the figure that scrambled to its feet. More like a spirit of the woods than any man, he was tall as a young alder, a russet hue upon him, but thinner than a man should ever be Hair and beard hung in long strands like felted wool, no proper garments that we could distinguish, just rags fastened to his flesh by dirt and scabs.

"Who are you?" growled Gereint, impatiently stabbing toward the creature with his sword. "Speak or take this for your silence."

"He fears the light. Lower it, Gereint!" I said, mastering my disquiet

Once the light was shielded somewhat, the man raised his head, looking searchingly toward me, like one who is blind "Who speaks so courteously to the betrayer?"

There was a buzz of excitement, disbelief, and wonder, for his voice had the accents of the high born or learned caste. More astounding was the authority in which the words were couched, spoken as one peer to another

"My lord Arthur, don't let this cursed *gruagach* bewitch you!" warned Cenlaigh, our rash Irishman, urgently clutching my arm. "How can such a tongue come from a ragged hairy thing as that?"

I swear the Irish see buccas and bannogs under every leaf Shaking him off, I stepped closer to scrutinize the creature's face. Under the ruin of one crusted, eyeless socket lay a thin, lined countenance that had never smiled nor might ever laugh again The remaining eye was not without intelligence, but though it held more than a man's weight of sorrow, it also gleamed with the feral wariness of a wild thing

"Will you come back with us?" I invited. All eyes turned upon me, at the strangeness of my request. But was this not an exile returning out of the dreadful pit of timeless horror back into the world of men? If some terrible enchantment had fallen on him, then it was my task to lift it, if I could "Stranger, whatever your name, know that you are the welcome guest of Arthur, leader of the British While you are under my protection, none will harm you or do you ill."

At my invitation, intelligence faded from the face of the stranger Becoming wholly animal, falling to his knees, he crawled over to where I stood and leaned against me, like a whipped dog Men turned away in shame from the spectacle. "Stand and come with us," I commanded him, but he would only follow me on all fours

So it was back in camp Not only would he not stand, he would not eat with us either, though many kind-hearted lads threw him titbits to cheer him. He would only accept our leavings, upon which he fell face-forward with his teeth like a dog, arms stretched out behind him as if his hands were useless. Afterwards, he scraped together some grass for bedding, lay on one side, well away from the fire and twitched into sleep

Cenlaigh pointedly bore his bed-roll farther away, jangling his druidic amulets noisily. There were many others making the sign against bad luck.

"I wager he'll be gone by morning, your hound," remarked Gereint, grisly and good-humoured from supper

"Mother of God, those are terrible wounds upon him!" said tender-hearted Bryce, looking down upon the wild man "Shall I clean him up, my lord?"

"Let him be," I bade them. "Let him sleep with out fear of torment."

I woke to find him near, watching me, waiting, his eye shining in the dark ruin of his face like a solitary star in the blackness of the heavens. There was a blessed intelligence within it again. Leaving aside my dish of cold chopped meat and oatmeal, I addressed him again, "Have you slept well, my friend?"

The eye glittered, "Sleep ever brings blessed forgetfulness " The grave voice was so sweet, I could have been conversing with my own bard than with this wild woodling with his green teeth and forest-mold skin God knows that by night he was a fearsome sight, but by morning's light, our wild guest was an affront to the dignity of man. No wonder he had in the forest! He inclined his body, without smiling, "But the more blessed are they whom the Amherawdwr calls friend

My curiosity was roused for it is a manner of speaking among the old families who held to Roman ways long after the legions left these shores to call me "Emperor after the British fashion because I have tried to weld together the troublesome tribes of this land under one leadership Only one gently raised would speak thus How far then had this poor wretch fallen?

Keeping my tone light, I said, "All guests of Arthur are his welcome friends, especially if they have a tale of wonder to tell What realms has this guest been wandering in and what befell him there?"

But before he could answer Sgilti Light Foot, my scout, brought me his report "My lord, forgive me, there are signs of Gwyn ap Nydd's devastation on every side upcountry "

I could have cursed, for the wild man was on the point of answering. Now he scuttled back like a spider, all elbows and knees, sinking back into a fearful, bestial silence

To Sgilti, I ordered, "Post outnders and root those archers out of the cook tent They must cover our advance."

The moment had passed Now we must press north as speedy as may be to release the noble captives whom Gwyn had imprisoned. As Sgilti had said, the land bore every mark of wanton destruction. Houses fired and abandoned, charred bodies in their ruins, young crops trampled down, cattle butchered and half-eaten. The farther north we pushed, the more fearful the sights Women and children impaled by spears and worse

We are the vanguard of the army that saw off the Saxons at Badon Hill, we have died and bled for the defense of the land. Some would call us heroes, though it is truer to say that we are as other men, who love their own hills and would rather be working the land or rearing their cattle or lying in the arms of a warm wife than forever at the work of slaughter But neither are we milk-blooded maidens We have hewn and hacked in the field of battle, skirmished at dawn, raided at midnight. We have witnessed the clumsy cruelties of the Saxon, the subtle maimings of the Pict, the barbarous tortures of the Irish but there are some atrocities that stick in the mind. To find worse things on your own threshold, perpetrated by your own kindred, was another matter.

"Tell me, Amlawdd, does the law of kindred absolve me from mercy to Gwyn?" I turned to ask my steward, only to find him doubled over in the saddle, puking up his breakfast.

Ever lawless and unpredictable, Gwyn was nicknamed the Son of Nydd, that old god of the mists whom druids invoked to cover their comings and goings. It was a pity that there was no such mist now to cover the sight that confronted us. A burned-out house and before it a row of heads upon poles, the man of the house, his wife, their children and servants, even the dog and the horses, aligned perfectly, each in order. Even the heads of hens were set upon sticks. Someone had had time to amuse themselves nicely without disturbance. The bodies had been butchered and then partially eaten. Only Iddawg the Curious, whose fearless reputation is built wholly on a complete absence of nerves, had the strength of stomach to look more closely at the half-eaten bodies. "This doesn't look like the work of wolves! Too tidy!" he decided. We tried to shutter our minds from the implication of his words.

"God grant us strength to avenge this!" Gereint cursed as he rode beside me, echoing the mood of the men who were dangerous with frustrated vengeance.

I spared a thought for the woman who had caused this conflict. Creiddylad, like a second Helen, had reaped this crop of devastation. What tender caresses was she enjoying in the arms of the most delicate Gwyn? And what of those prisoners we rode to rescue? The company rode grimly on, pondering the likely state of Gwyn's captives.

While we walked the wild man loped at my heels, indifferent to the horrors on every side. But he had to be trussed in the supply wagon when we rode hard. Rather than have him bound, I acceded reluctantly to a loose band about his ankle to keep him in the wagon, or he would have been lost, such was the speed we maintained. I did not want his death on my soul, poor miserable creature that he was.

When we encamped, we dug steep-sided ditches and doubled the guard yet, despite this, several horses were stolen in the night and two guards lay dying in the camp, mysteriously pierced by short black darts tipped with a slow poison.

Once again that night I gently tried to win the wild man's confidence, giving orders that none should approach me but to take all matters of import to Gereint. The wild man gulped the leavings of my supper like a dog and began to retreat into the bushes, when I called him, "Friend, your emperor bids you drink with him," extending a horn of beer toward him.

Cautiously he crawled back, half-dog, half spider. As he snuffed at the beer, remembrance flooded his one eye from which a lone tear fell, leaving a trail down his filthy cheek. "No beer for the betrayer," he shook his head, rocking himself backward and forward.

"Friend, your emperor begs you tell your tale. Do not be afraid, for he will reward you, not despise you."

The wild man laid his head on one side, as if hearkening to some unheard voice, if it were safe to unlock the door of memory. "Let him ask anything but that. If he were to hear, his vengeance would be swift."

I encouraged him as best I could. "Tell me, friend. The emperor will not harm you, whatever the tale you tell."

"Do you swear by the holy Mother of God?" It was the first time he had spoken so directly to me.

"By God, his holy Mother, and all his saints," I fervently swore, though it is well known I am not averse to swearing by Fortuna Victrix or by Mogons, by Camulos or Mars either—a man must seek victorious allies wherever he can, after all. But my word is still my word—as long as loyalty and the pay-chest hold out.

The eye deadened. "There is no God. His saints are asleep.... Only his Mother might still receive such a one as the betrayer. . ." He settled down on his haunches, his hands loose beside him as if the strings of his wrists had been cut. I only hoped that I would survive the proximity of his tale, for his odor was truly awful.

He began, as if remembering something long forgotten. "There was a man .. in the land above Carventium. Nechton, the best of men, the most loving father. He had four sons: Cunedda, Vorstyl, Ruien, and Lodec." The naming of them robbed him of breath, almost of life, for he shuddered and twisted as if trying to leave his own skin. Nechton was sworn to the service of Gwythyr ap Greidiol. At his command, Nechton went hunting with his sons and grandsons, following the trail of Gwythyr's enemy, to seek his lost wife. It led them into an impenetrable mist in which they were lost. Twelve there were who rode out, mark you, but only one returned." He snuffed the air for danger. "There was a substance to that mist, a presence that put us out of mind of our errand. When the mist rose, night was behind and a fortress ahead. They rode there for shelter and were received by a ma . ." He shook his head violently, fearfully. "By the Black One. They were welcomed and feasted and made much of. Afterward the Black One asked what sport his guests might offer.

"Little did Nechton think when he looked at his sons and grandsons what sport they would give! He called upon Cunedda to sing and upon his grandsons to dance. The others would have kept time with their knives upon the table, but these had been cleared away. So they kept time with their feet. The boys danced the wolf-dance, which they dance with their spears to warm themselves when they are on wolf-watch over the flocks. But they had no spears. Every weapon had been left with the porter in his lodge, for they thought themselves among friends."

Leaping ahead of his telling, I realized with sinking dread that the Black One must be Gwyn.

"Now while Nechton's kindred kept up their chorus, howling out the wolf-cry, the Black One signed to his men who filed behind where the guests sat and lifted a heavy chain over their heads, dragging it back round their necks. While they struggled, other men came with axes and opened the breasts of each seated guest and pulled out their still-beating hearts. Cunedda and the boys cried out in horror, but they were seized and restrained.

"Then said the Black One: 'This is but poor sport! Fetch the cook and a fry pan.' Then he made his servants take the heart of Nechton, father to us all, and chop it into collops and fry it over the fire. . ." The wild man broke off, demonstrating that his hands were not without power, for he stroked his long, ragged nails down his face and chest without cease, as he spoke, toneless and dull. "They fried that good heart and offered it to Cunedda and the boys and when they would not take it, the Black One said, 'And I was told that these men of the northern forests ate the courage of their fathers when they were dead! This information is evidently incorrect. Cut the legs off these dancers, for they have not pleased me!'"

THE WILD MAN STARED INTO THE NIGHT'S DARKNESS, UNSEEING, THE PATTER OF HIS VOICE UNSPARINGLY TELLING WHAT NO MAN SHOULD HEAR.

The wild man stared into the night's darkness, unseeing, the patter of his voice unspaningly telling what no man should hear. "Then Cunedda pleaded with all his eloquence for the boys, that they not be harmed. 'Well, singer!' the Black One said, 'Eat this heart right up and I shall spare the boys. And they forced Cunedda down onto a bench and they thrust the heart of Nechton down his throat and moved his jaws that he might eat it .. and Cunedda ate it."

Throwing back his head, he gave the most lamentable howl that

would surely have sent the wolves themselves packing. Then cowering his head with both arms, he scuttled back into the shadows too ashamed to be seen.

Unclenching my fist where the nails had drawn blood, I poured out the horn of beer onto the earth, breathing, "God have mercy!"

The wild man's one eye flashed with an uncomprehending anger. "He has none! The Black One spared the boys to be his wolf pack, confining them without any food save human flesh. He has taught them to gnaw the bones of the living and the dead—those whom he has not made mad. The betrayer he blinded in one eye and cast him out into the wilderness. From that day onward, he has lived in the woods, never lifting hand to his accursed mouth. He has tried to die many times, but life is his enduring penance."

I had sworn not to harm him, but never have I been stronger minded to put a wounded man out of his agony than at that moment. One merciful stroke, that's all, not to have to look upon the wretch

cape, under which he might retreat from the searching gaze of the company. No boots could be found for him, his feet were too horny and unaccustomed to footwear. With nails trimmed and sores anointed with salve, he might pass for a man, though he still hugged the shadows like an animal. We filled our bowls with oatmeal round the fire while I conferred with my commanders.

Seeing Cunedda scooping his oatmeal with his hand into his mouth, Gereint leant over, saying, "God's greetings, Cunedda. Will you take this horn spoon?" And our wild man took it with a grave courtesy and return of greeting. Since his terrible telling, he seemed somehow diminished. His face, cleansed of dirt, was scored with scratches from his own long nails, like some Roman statue vandalized by the sword strokes of Saxons. No more a free spirit, he had become like one of the grave, unsmiling stones that thrust solitary out of these misty hills, weathered witnesses to time's decay.

THEN WITH HORROR WE WATCHED AS CUNEDDA OPENED THE BACK OF HIS OWN HAND WITH A KNIFE THAT HE HAD CONCEALED IN HIS SLEEVE, AND HELD OUT HIS HAND TO THEM.

any longer. For this man's father, Nechton, had been the Pictish sword-brother to Uther, my father. Shame rose in me, for the stain of Gwyn's cruelty fell upon my family. I turned aside to spit out the bitter bile that rose from my stomach.

No words of comfort came to my lips, but something was due. Picking up Caledfylch, my sword, I unsheathed it, letting its dragon light glimmer. Hope flashed in the wild man's eye, and he parted the long tatters of his beard to bare his chest. "No, Cunedda ap Nechton! This is not for thee, but for the Black One—for Gwyn ap Nydd—who did this to thee. I will not sheath my sword until I have drawn his blood."

Then I called Bryce from the fire, "Our wild man has a name, after all. Come and tend to Cunedda the Wild as gently as may be. If you can, wash him, clean his wounds with wine, give him clothing—but no weapon . . . not yet!"

The butchered bodies on the road had been the work of no four legged wolves, I knew now. Truly Gwyn led the escort of the grave. In a hastily summoned council, I related as much of Cunedda's tale as dealt with the death of his kindred, saying nothing of what the wild man had been made to eat, nor about the flesh-eating boys whom Gwyn had trained. The council took in the story silently, eyes upon Caledfylch unsheathed, at the set of my jaw.

"By Jupiter Maximus! We shall have Gwyn's hide for this!" cried Gereint. The others swore their own oaths, backing him up.

"I am of their mind," said cool Cadwr of Dumnonia, stroking the breast of his hawk with a gloved finger. "But you are kin to Gwyn ap Nydd, cousin. Would you slay your own kindred?"

There he had me. As military leader of Britain, I had the task of welding together the quarrelsome tribes and feuding lords of many regions, essential if we were to overcome those who threatened our shores from every side. Potential allies are not impressed by rulers who slay their kindred indiscriminately. The example of kings like the unlamented Vortigern still festered in living memory: a man who killed his own kindred, slept with his own step-daughter, and who detestably invited Saxon troops in to police our own British shores. No, I did not wish to join the ranks of such a one!

Much of that night I spent sleeplessly considering how I could deal with Gwyn and not lose face for having drawn Caledfylch with such an oath. And always the thought of the torment of prisoners yet living came between me and my sleep.

At dawn of the following day it was Cunedda, and not the wild man, who joined us. Bryce's handiwork was remarkable. With shorn hair and trimmed beard, our wild man looked almost human. He wore the tunic and trousers of one of the dead guards and a hooded

We reached Our Quinn. The siege before Gwyn's stronghold was no Trojan epic. Twelve days brought the stronghold to submission, its strength no defense against hunger. Now we conferred under a flag of truce at the fording place of the mountain stream, as the winds sent down diagonal shafts of piercingly cold rain. I received my accursed kinsman's sword in surrender. Gwyn, smooth and subtle, as only the addition of faery blood can make a man, stood easily hand on his empty sword belt, his insouciance belying the devastation he had caused.

"You make me come north at a perilous time, Gwyn!" I began, sounding peevish. "Release the woman into my custody and free the prisoners you have taken."

He inclined the top half of his body, "If the Emperor Arthur commands it." A wealth of insult flooded every inflection of his lying tongue. At a flick of his fingers, the gigantic bodyguard beside him unfastened a hoop of keys and threw them at my feet. Amlawdd retrieved them, lest I should be made to bend and humble myself. I threw them to Gereint and Cadwr. "See that all prisoners are released and brought out!"

While we stood at the ford, they took a heavily armored escort into the stronghold and brought out the captives. Gwythyr and his five commanders emerged blinking into the daylight. They proved to be hungry but unharmed, though their men had a worse tale to tell. The woman, Creiddylad—no Helen after all—was led forth, looking none the worse for her abduction, on a roan-colored palfrey. As she was escorted passed Gwyn, he raised his hand to blow her a kiss. The lingering look that she gave him told me all I needed to know about her. Why women lust after such men as Gwyn I shall never know . . . As long as she be kept out of my sight, I could restrain the anger that flamed in me. But truly, she was no longer the reason I had come here.

"*All* your prisoners, Gwyn. Others you have—the kindred of Nechton."

He crooked a questioning black brow, "Ah! You mean the two wolf whelps! I warn you, cousin, if I let *them* loose, you will need a cunning hound master to control them."

Imperturbably, I answered, "I have such a one. Let them be loosed!"

His men brought out two famine-thin feral youths from under a grate in the courtyard. Naked, they strained at the end of leashes fastened to their necks like hounds. Their hungry eyes and excited throaty cries proclaimed them wolves rather than men. Beside me, I felt the shaking of the wild man. I steadied him with, "Tame them, Cunedda! They are your kin."

As the human wolf whelps slipped from their leashes, men drew back on both sides, bringing up their shields tight to their chests, extending spear and sword toward them. Unerringly the wolf-men followed the blood trail of the wounded prisoners being conducted back to our camp, sniffing the ground with excitement, baring blood stained teeth. Then they caught the cross-scent of the wild man as he stepped into their path.

Cunedda threw back his hood, drew himself up to his full height and called in a glad musical voice, "Vorddien? Gordryd? Come to me, my sons!"

The rain had ceased and a fitful sun shone into the valley. The wolfwhelps stopped, expectant, puzzled, then bounded toward him. "For God's sake, cover him, Iddawg!" I breathed, losing my nerve. But before he could draw bow, the wolf-whelps halted their career, circling Cunedda, stiff-legged, cautious. For a brief moment, wolf-whelps were but starveling youths, entranced by the long-forgotten accents of their father who continued talking to them as if they were still men.

Then with horror we watched as Cunedda opened the back of his own hand with a knife that he had concealed in his sleeve, and held out his hand to them. It was almost too quick to understand, how Cunedda embraced his sons even as they fell upon their father's bloody flesh. It was only the flash of sunlight on the upraised blade and its sudden descent into their bodies that told me. The wolf-whelps twitched and turned in their agony, then lay still, devoured by death. The only sounds over the wide, hushed valley were the lamentations of Cunedda over his dead sons.

In that frozen instant, Gwyn gave a shout of laughter til I silenced it, holding Caledfylch to his throat, drawing a bead of blood. "My curse upon you, Gwyn ap Nydd! For the work you have wrought here may you live eleven lifetimes pursued by the souls of those you have slain!"

Turning to Iddawc, I ordered, "Bind him and bring him south for judgment."

We raised a mound over the bodies of Vorddien and Gordryd ap Cunedda, but set up no stone to stir memory and draw out the venom of their story. Let earth receive them and bring them peace.

I should have liked to take revenge then and there, but now I am the Amherawdr Arthur the Mighty, I must behave as a king. In all honor I could sheath Caledfylch since I had drawn Gwyn's blood, as promised. But on the long road south, I took counsel with the only person fit to judge my cousin.

So it was that in the great hall of Caer Sent, that had once been the Fortress of the Legions, I rose to pronounce judgment. I spoke first to Gwythyr, the wronged bridegroom, a pugnacious little man given to provoking petty squabbles, who doubtless had inflamed the northern situation with his thwarted passion for this worthless woman. "Thanks to the men of Britain, you and your army are restored to liberty. As to your intended bride—" She turned her head away from the bandaged Gwythyr with distain, peering at Gwyn beneath her veil. "Creiddylad daughter of Llydd Silver Hand has been brought out of the house of Gwyn alive. As it is not clear whose child she will bear, I am accounting her as a widow. Let her return to her father's house until it is clear what is the outcome of this abduction. In the meantime, Gwythyr, you will restore her dowry to her father."

Outrage flickered in his close-set eyes, but I continued, "But for the loss, inconvenience, and indignity of your imprisonment, Gwyn will compensate you threefold the woman's bride-price. Are you satisfied?" He stroked his long mustaches, trying to look as dignified as greed and cuckoldry would allow, and assented with a slow nod.

Then I turned to Gwyn, his strange almost colorless eyes curiously amused. "Unlawfully you have taken this woman and retained her, though not against her will, I warrant. However, I judge this misdeed less than the devastation you have wrought upon the land and its people, especially upon the family of Nechton. For the barbarity that you wrought upon him, I give you wholly into the charge of Cunedda ap Nechton to be his dog for eleven months. That is one month for every life of his kindred that you took and shortened. Confined upon Ynys Giden, you will be chained like a dog about the neck for that period, and will eat the leavings of Cunedda's plate." Gwyn's smile vanished, to be replaced by cold anger. Ynys Giden, Goat Island, was but a bare rock of an island thrust into the Western Sea thirty miles from the coast of Britain.

There was outcry from around the hall at the harshness of the sentence against a high born Briton of my own family. I raised my voice for all to hear, "Let it be clear, Gwyn has shamed my blood. Though I may not slay him, let this be known by all my kindred: no man of my blood is exempt from the wrath of kingly judgment. This shameful sentence shall stand, for the love of Nechton, sword brother to Uther my father, and to avenge the deaths of Nechton's sons and grandsons."

Into the ringing silence floated a solitary expulsion of sound, a ragged remnant of what I cannot truly call a laugh.

I looked to the tall, thin gray robed man, his ruined face hidden in his cowl, who stood nearby watching the collaring of Gwyn with a grim satisfaction. When it was accomplished, he nodded back and turned into the sacellum, where once the legionary pay-chest had been held but which was now a chapel dedicated to St. Martin. Only he and I knew who had uttered that bitter laughter, for none would ever associate this grim hermit with levity.

Since our return south, Cunedda had been much in the company of Bishop Cynwal, who had finally heard his confession and pronounced a penance that would restore the wild man's dignity.

On the altar-table stood a relief of St. Martin, the soldier-priest, tearing in two his cloak to cover the bare back of a beggar. Cunedda stood proudly, both palms raised toward a mercy that had been denied him. In the grave, newly tonsured man in his coarse gray robe, his forehead smudged with ash, you could just discern what he had once been. I waited til he had finished his prayer and asked, "What now, Cunedda? Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"It is enough, my emperor. You have given me my island hermitage. God will give me the rest of my life to atone for the deeds I have committed."

Ah, he spoke of God! Laying one hand upon his shoulder, "Then may God and his Holy Mother go with you! And may the ancestors of your race forgive my kindred."

"There is peace between me and thee," he said, tugging the knotted cord tighter about his skeletal waist. Surely the leavings of the wild man's penitential plate would not furnish much of a meal for Gwyn?

As I watched him onto the curragh bound for Ynys Giden with his most unwilling hound, I wondered. I do not know how one who has eaten his father's heart, or seen his brothers murdered, who has witnessed the shapeshifting of his sons into wolves, or who has had to kill his own children can find the narrow way to sanity, but I believe the wild man will perhaps find a way. If suffering can pave the path to paradise, then Cunedda's penance must surely suffice or there is little hope for us all.

That is the story of Cunedda the wild man. Does that satisfy your curiosity? And no, it was not the woman's fault, I grant you. But my judgment still stands. Let her stay in the house of her father and may Gwythyr and Gwyn fight it out in single combat every Mayday til the ending of the world for all I care! ❧

NOTE. This is one of the untold stories hidden within Culhwch and Olwen, *that great compendium of lost British Celtic tales, one of the oldest stories in the* Mabinogion. *It tells how Gwyn ap Nydd made Cunedda mad, and draws upon a traditional theme common in Celtic myth, of the* ndere gan gaire, *or the laughless knight. Its wider context is the abortive abduction of Creddylad, daughter of Llydd Llaw Ereint, whom we know better as Cordelia, daughter of King Lear. The Welsh* dd *is pronounced* th *as in* that. *Treat* y *like the* i *in* with.

The Goblins are Coming! Really.

BY ARI BERK

International best-selling artist, author, and fairy authority Brian Froud and folklorist, goblinologist, and author Ari Berk once again join forces, lifting the moldy latch and opening the door to the world of GOBLINS!

Containing Messrs. Froud and Berk's curious experiments and firsthand knowledge, GOBLINS! is the single greatest source of information regarding the most vile and humorous Goblin habits, lifestyles, literature, art, customs, culture, and cuisine. Realms of Fantasy *gets an exclusive early look into the whole unfortunate affair.*

(We dare not ignore them. For
have expressed to me their extreme
more attractive cousins) are

one thing, my goblin informants displeasure that faeries (their stealing all the press these days."

Brian Froud always does things the hard way.

We had just completed work on the most extensive and, frankly, regrettable study of goblins ever to be compiled by human scholars when we received a call from *Realms of Fantasy*, asking for an interview for their renowned Gallery segment. We were, at the time, not really speaking to each other. Our research into the Goblin Realms had gone horribly wrong, resulting in our frantic flight from Brian's then (probably still) infested house. After several days of fleeing the most odoriferous and noxious assaults from the goblins, we took refuge in Cornwall in the hellfry of the Shady-Pines Complete Care Asylum/Spa and Fish Mongery. We had been sharing a tiny garret room, because Abrams Books (our publisher) refused to pay for separate executive suites. However, since Brian kept stealing the fruit cocktail from my dinner trays, I had asked to be moved to other quarters (defraying the additional costs by secretly charging it to Brian's credit card). When the request for the *ROF* interview arrived, I asked Brian to come the phone. He refused, locking himself in his room and singing the entire score of *Oklahoma!* at the top of his voice until he had to be sedated. I asked if he might prefer to write his comments regarding his life's work of visually chronicling the goblins' nasty incursions into our world. He again locked his door and refused. Finally, after I pushed three helpings of fruit cocktail under his door with my shoe, he agreed to answer any questions put to him, so long as I agreed to wear my full academic regalia while standing on one foot through the whole interview. Here, gentle reader, is the transcript of our "conversation."

BERK: Brian, perhaps you say could something about how the whole goblin project came about?

FROUD: Well, for nearly my whole life, I have been annoyed by these creatures. Stealing my socks, hiding my brushes, sticking sodden tongues in my ear. Well, that last one I rather liked, but don't tell them. But the trouble really began, as well you know, Professor, with my obtaining the use of the Goblin Camera.

[He was referring to his theft of a curious piece of photographic equipment from the basement of the Cottington Archive, which I, as Curator General of that esteemed collection, was currently investigating with a view toward prosecution.]

BERK: Yes, the photographs are quite remarkable. You used cheese as bait, did you not?

FROUD: Indeed. I quickly found that various types of cheeses attracted different kinds of goblins, though what they like about cheese I cannot fathom. I've never seen a goblin eat any. Perhaps they take it away to eat in private, or it may serve some ritual purpose I've not yet discovered. There are even rumors of goblin cheese sculptures of an erotic nature. In any event, it was after the careful development of one of those early photographs that I wrote to you.

BERK: Very wise of you. You'll recall I was currently translating portions of the infamous *Codex Goblinensis*, the largest goblin-produced body of lore ever penned and stuck to the bottom of a bus seat.

FROUD: How could I forget? It's all your fault, really—you with your "scholarly inquiry" and your "for the good of mankind" and your "oh, just one more gin fizz won't kill you, will it?" Oh, the humanity! The stink of them! Their dirty little feet . . their nasty, nasty tricks. My reputation! My poor dog! The costs of it all

[At this point, Froud had become quite hysterical. We paused while the nurse uncovered the "instruments," which had an immediate calming effect on his shattered nerves, then proceeded.]

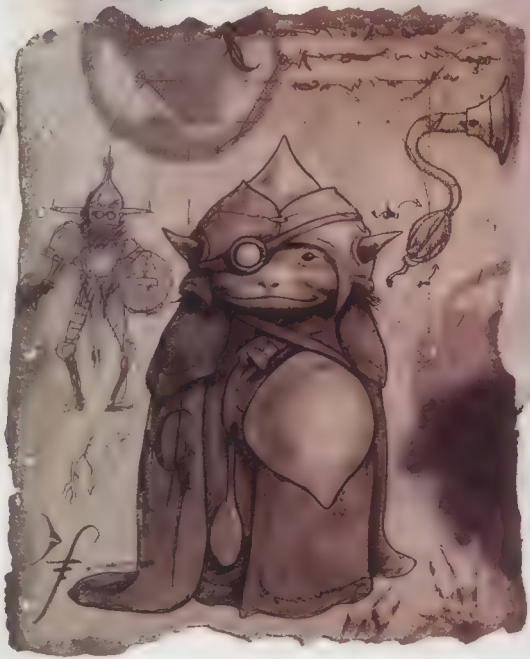
BERK: Let us change the topic slightly. Perhaps you can say something about your technique for painting them? You did complete, did you not, many portraits of individual goblins for this study? Was it difficult getting them to sit for you?

FROUD: Sit? Yes, very difficult, for they hardly ever stand still. But they were constantly buzzing about, soaping the windows, badgering the dog.

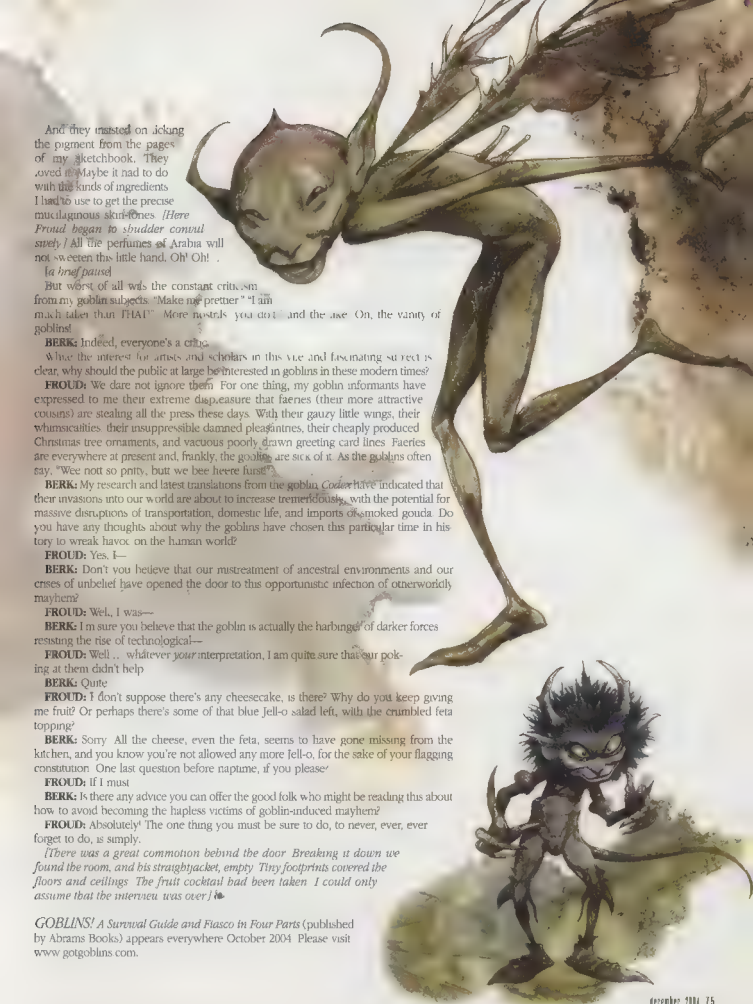
[This last portion of his answer was garbled.]

BERK: What the dog? "Badgering"?

FROUD: If you like



The paintings, photographs, and other images shown here are but a sampling of the vast collection offered up by Mr Froud in GOBLINS!



And they insisted on licking the pigment from the pages of my sketchbook. They loved it. Maybe it had to do with the kinds of ingredients I had to use to get the precise mucilaginous skin tones. *[Here Froud began to shudder convulsively.]* All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh! Oh! . . .

[a brief pause]

But worst of all was the constant criticism from my goblin subjects. "Make me prettier." "I am much taller than THAT." "More nostrils, you dolt!" and the like. Oh, the vanity of goblins!

BERK: Indeed, everyone's a critic.

While the interest for artists and scholars in this vile and fascinating subject is clear, why should the public at large be interested in goblins in these modern times?

FROUD: We dare not ignore them. For one thing, my goblin informants have expressed to me their extreme displeasure that faeries (their more attractive cousins) are stealing all the press these days. With their gauzy little wings, their whimsicalities, their unsuppressible damned pleasantnes, their cheaply produced Christmas tree ornaments, and vacuous poorly drawn greeting card lines. Faeries are everywhere at present and, frankly, the goblins are sick of it. As the goblins often say, "Wee nott so pritty, but we bee heere furst!"

BERK: My research and latest translations from the goblin *Codex* have indicated that their invasions into our world are about to increase tremendously, with the potential for massive disruptions of transportation, domestic life, and imports of smoked gouda. Do you have any thoughts about why the goblins have chosen this particular time in history to wreak havoc on the human world?

FROUD: Yes. I—

BERK: Don't you believe that our mistreatment of ancestral environments and our crises of unbelief have opened the door to this opportunistic infection of otherworldly mayhem?

FROUD: Well, I was—

BERK: I'm sure you believe that the goblin is actually the harbinger of darker forces resisting the rise of technological—

FROUD: Well . . . whatever *your* interpretation, I am quite sure that our poking at them didn't help.

BERK: Quite.

FROUD: I don't suppose there's any cheesecake, is there? Why do you keep giving me fruit? Or perhaps there's some of that blue Jell-o salad left, with the crumbled feta topping?

BERK: Sorry. All the cheese, even the feta, seems to have gone missing from the kitchen, and you know you're not allowed any more Jell-o, for the sake of your flagging constitution. One last question before rapture, if you please.

FROUD: If I must.

BERK: Is there any advice you can offer the good folk who might be reading this about how to avoid becoming the hapless victims of goblin-induced mayhem?

FROUD: Absolutely! The one thing you must be sure to do, to never, ever, ever forget to do, is simply:

[There was a great commotion behind the door. Breaking it down we found the room, and his straightjacket, empty. Tiny footprints covered the floors and ceilings. The fruit cocktail had been taken. I could only assume that the interview was over.] ❧

GOBLINS! A Survival Guide and Fiasco in Four Parts (published by Abrams Books) appears everywhere October 2004. Please visit www.gotgoblins.com.

the secret of making brains

By Joe Murphy
• Illustration by Andrea Wicklund •

"The secret of making brains," Grampser muttered, "is to use good quality glass." He peered at Sprokly, gap-toothed grin set in a sea of weathered wrinkles. His eyes twinkled merrily through the jeweler's lens soldered to his spectacles.

Grampser *never* told the truth.

So Sprokly simply nodded, hands folded in her lap. The youngest of the Maelzel family, today being her thirteenth birthday, she'd finally been allowed in the workshop. Grampser plucked a tiny glass cog from a work table surrounded by various small bins, each glittering in the slanted light through dust-streaked windows.

"Don't look at this." Grampser held the jewel-sized cog in front of her nose. Good as Sprokly's eyes were, she could just make out minute letters etched into each jagged glass tooth. Hebrew letters, English letters, enigmatic letters older than Babylon glinted among curlicue numbers and arcane symbols. "Worthless, this cog."

"And is it finally finished?" Daddy, sitting across from her, frowned up at them. Her Daddy was short, a dwarfish body on stump legs, gorilla arms that ended in long slender fingers. Beautiful supple fingers, like Victor Borge's, whom they'd watched last night on Ed Sullivan.

"Hell no, boy." Grampser grinned and held the tweezers out past Sprokly. "It'll never be ready."

Daddy absently plucked the cog from Grampser's tweezers with his own pair. His eyes and attention focused on the open skull of the man-sized relation slumped between his knees.

Sprokly sucked in her breath. She recognized the three rows of glittering glass cogs set above the handle——a tuning spork.

The relation's brain glittered, glass cogs, silver wires, golden ratchets, mother-of-pearl pulleys. All inscribed, Sprokly saw, with equally mysterious numbers, symbols, and letters.

"That'll do it." Daddy grinned and mopped his high forehead where a swatch of blond hair lay plastered. He rubbed his hands with a hanky, and then flipped the skull-top over the relation's brain. Small screws waited, already in place. Daddy tightened each one with a small screwdriver. Done, he picked up a winding key from his workbench.

"The girl shouldn't do it," Grampser told him.

"You're absolutely right." Daddy beamed. He held out the key.

Sprokly scooted off her stool, smoothed the wrinkles from her gingham dress, and made sure her fingers were clean. She smiled. She was a good winder, good as Marybeth or Billy, although they'd done it much longer.

Carefully she inserted the key into the base of the relation's skull. Deftly she began to turn it, her other hand on the relation's horse-bristle hair, holding the skull steady. Grampser sat back with folded arms, grinning. Daddy sipped a glass of moon tea.

Sprokly kept count of the turns, losing herself in the numbers, winding until her wrist could barely move and her fingers would n't let go.

"Nine, ninety nine," she said at last. She pushed the key deeper into the relation's skull, heard the clicking of the spring lock, and then smoothly pulled the key out. "Le magique de vie!"

The relation stiffened. Its hands came up and touched its overalls. Its head swiveled. In the Workshop's silence, the hum of its springs, the tiny clicking of a thousand cogs mimicked the distant crickets.

"Hello," it said with a voice like sand sliding around in a pail.

"Don't take it out of the barn," Grampser rumbled. "Let it sit idle."

"Then see to your other chores." Daddy nodded. "Take your winding key. Might be others that need it."

"And pay no attention to your cousins, girl," Gramps warned.

"Let's go then." Sprokly took the relation's hand and helped it stand. Hip bearings squeaked but the new ones always did that.

"And remember," Grampser called when they'd reached the door. "The secret of making brains is good quality glass!"

"Yes," Daddy agreed. "The secret of making brains is good quality glass." The two elders looked at each other, then at Sprokly. Finally, they chuckled and turned back to their workbenches.

Grampser *never* told the truth but Daddy *always* did.

Sprokly frowned. So how could they say the same thing? What could they mean? Opening the door, she squinted and led the relation out into the harsh Texas sun.

"The barn's across town," Sprokly told the relation. Not that it would understand, relations being rather simple minded. Still, Ma said that politeness mattered to all creatures.

"Town?" The relation's awkward strides jerked along. "What's Town?"

"This place." Sprokly gestured at the empty street lined with unpainted rickety buildings. "Waxachole-Nazarine. Grampser named it when he brought the family here."

Sand, tumbleweeds, lean tos, cacti, a few low-growing mesquite trees buzzed with cicadas. The sun sizzled in the sky, burning it to an eye-hurting white. Beyond the buildings, the thin band of the Red River snaked through the sandy slope of the valley.

Nearby, on a flattened rock shelf, a horned toad the size of one of Ma's pancakes and just as blackly burned, glared at them with red-bead eyes. A dog rolled up and stopped to sniff the relation's ankles.

"A monster!" The relation drew its foot up and cringed.

Just one of Grampser's guard dogs," Sprokly shrugged. "Don't pay it no mind and it'll leave you be." She reached down, inserted the key into the painted head, and gave the dog a quick wind. "Scoot, get on out of here now."

Quicksilver eyes gazed up at her. A red leather tongue lolled in the dog's mouth. It rolled away then, tail straightening, wheels spinning dust as it picked up speed and zipped around a corner.

Sprokly and the relation turned down the same street. A couple of cousins jumped rope in the slim shade of the mercantile's haphazardly sloped awning.

Sprokly!" First Cousin laughed. "Wanna play?"

"Yeah, wanna play?" Fourth Cousin, or maybe it was Sixth, Sprokly could never be sure since they all wore the same narrow faces and faded cotton dresses. The jump rope fell to the ground, coiling like a rattler.

"Not right now." Sprokly gripped her wind-up key, a talisman before her. She stepped back, keeping her distance. Unlike relations, cousins could be cunning. Grampser's idea he'd built his own sense of humor into them, but without his heart, they'd turned out on the malicious side. "I've got to set up this relation."

"Come back and play then." First Cousin winked at Sixth. They took each other's hands and smiled at her.

"Sure," Sprokly lied. "Just give me a few minutes." She backed the relation away with her, turning only when she was sure they were out of rock-throwing range.

"They sound important." The relation almost stumbled as it glanced back at the cousins. "Do I listen to them too?"

"Naw." Sprokly shook her head. "They'll just get you in trouble. But you listen to family. That'll be me, Billy, Marybeth, or the elders, Grampser, Daddy, and especially Ma. Otherwise, just stick to your task."

"What is my task?" The relation looked down at her with painted marble eyes.

"You're supposed to wind up the cows. Feed 'em the dirt and trash, whatever the other relations bring. Then milk 'em every morning. Bring the milk up to the house and Ma'll give you a clean bucket for the next day."

"Look!" The relation jerked to a halt, a crooked finger twitching up to point. "Monsters attacking the barn?"

"Come on!" Sprokly stared at the commotion up ahead and broke into a trot.

A pack of Grampser's dogs wheeled and zipped around something. They'd backed it up against the barn wall and set off their sirens. The cows had raised an alarm too, their warbled lowing added to the clamor.

"Steady now," Sprokly called, brushing the hair from her eyes as she reached the beasts. One backed up, showing its can fangs, but not at her. A heap of rags and flesh staggered and fell against the barn wall with a tremendous thump. The dogs moved in, tearing, snapping, and snarling.

"Stop it," Sprokly called, then mimicking Grampser's voice, "Tarnation! That's damn near enough!"

The dogs fell back, rattling and growling but giving Sprokly a clear view.

"What is it?" The relation cocked its head.

"Well I'll be switched!" Sprokly leaned forward, shading her eyes with a hand to see the smears of blood in the dust, the cringing

huddle of flesh. "It's a man!"

"What is 'man'?" The relation asked

"Never you mind." Sprokly turned to it. "Can you find your way back to the workshop?"

"I think so." The relation looked up the street the way they'd come and scratched its head.

"Go get Grampser. Tell him we got a trespasser at the barn," Sprokly ordered. "Hurry now. Git!"

The relation wobbled off. Sprokly waved the dogs back and this time, they obeyed. She moved in close. A pair of dark brown eyes gazed up at her. The man moaned and held its leg. Blood seeped through its fingers. It was a sight to see, yes indeed. Even though it was hurt, it still managed a weak grin.

"Thanks," it rasped. "You saved my butt, little lady."

"You're welcome," Sprokly said, then poked it with her finger. "Uh, mister? Are you real?"

The man gave her a strange look and slowly nodded. Satisfied, Sprokly folded her arms. She'd never seen a real one before, except for Billy and the elders, of course. What a birthday this was turning out to be!

"Studyin' horned toads?" Grampser guffawed and slapped the table. A well-polished Colt revolver next to him jumped with the thud. "That's the most intelligent thing I ever heard."

"Well," the young man, whom Sprokly had learned was named Horton, said, "I'm glad you understand."

Grampser laughed again. Daddy joined in. Marybeth in tight jeans, black hair pinned up, began to laugh. Over in her sewing chair, Ma's eyes crinkled. A heavy set woman with iron gray hair and a perpetually tired smile, she shifted and resettled the knitting basket, looking down to hide her amusement. Only Sprokly's brother Billy continued to regard Horton with wide-eyed wonder.

"I'm working on a degree in Herpetology," Horton explained, his bruised young face full of thoughtful seriousness. "Over at the college in Wichita Falls."

"A degree in lizard watching," Daddy said and clasped his hands on the table. "Now imagine that."

"Imagine that," Marybeth echoed and laughed again.

"Why do you want to study them?" Billy asked, cradling his pimply chin on wide, flat hands. "The horned toads, I mean."

"They're a species that can only be found in this area." Horton winced as he crossed his legs. Sprokly saw him touch the bandages around his calf gingerly. "The black ones; surely you've noticed."

Grampser's washed out eyes flicked toward Daddy. Daddy nodded, ever so slightly. Marybeth looked at them both, then turned to Horton and shrugged.

"I've seen those. Fast little things." She folded her arms across a well-endowed checkered shirt. "But so what?"

"Well," Horton shifted again, glancing every now and then at Grampser's Colt. "You won't find them in Vernon. Nor Chillicothe, or Quanah. Not even in Wichita Falls. I only came across one accidentally when I stopped to change a flat on the highway. I thought they might make a good paper."

"Fact is," Daddy put in, "they was more interesting than the no trespassing signs. That it, boy?"

Horton looked down at the table. "Well, yes sir. I didn't think anyone was really out here. Especially when the road ended some miles back." He looked up, clean-shaven face set with defiance, although Sprokly was sure his lower lip quivered. "You can't keep out Science."

"I suppose that's true." Daddy leaned back in his chair and gazed at Horton. He reached into a shirt pocket then and pulled out a spoon-handled object.

Sprokly sucked in her breath. She recognized the three rows of glittering glass cogs set above the handle—a tuning spork.

Daddy held the tuning spork up until it caught the light through the window. A thousand ghostly prisms flickered over the walls, each with a shadowed blur of a letter in the center. The house grew quiet.

Ma smiled down at her sewing. Marybeth's grin widened, her eyes on Daddy. Daddy and Grampser studied Horton intently. The young man's mouth had fallen open; the emptiness of a relation stared out from his fine brown eyes.

"Don't do it!" Billy muttered through clenched teeth.

"Quiet, son!" Daddy hissed, his eyes never leaving Horton's.

"I'm sure if we let him go, he'd never tell a soul," Grampser growled softly.

"But Daddy," Billy tried again, half rising from his chair. Daddy quietly flicked one of the spork's cogs. Shadowed letter prisms whirled on the walls.

"Grampser, make him stop!" Sprokly leapt from her chair, plunged herself into Grampser's surprised arms. "Just for a little while. Just for today." She hugged herself against him, squeezing with all her strength. "Just for my birthday!" She glanced at her open-mouthed brother just as Billy started to grin.

"I 'spose there's harm in that." Grampser reached up and stroked Sprokly's hair.

"Sir?" Daddy glanced over at him.

"Keep on with it, son." Grampser pulled Sprokly onto his knee. Daddy scowled and lowered the tuning spork. Prisms vanished.

Horton blinked.

"You're spoiling her." Marybeth glared at Sprokly.

"He spoiled you enough," Billy turned to her, fists balling. "He made you that pony when you were only twelve."

"Don't forget what he made you!" Marybeth's voice took a snide, malicious edge. "Haven't seen you out behind the barn since."

Billy blushed, freckles vanishing in the redness of his cheeks.

"One day." Daddy put the tuning spork away, looking at Grampser. "And that's all, sir. Agreed?"

"No," said Grampser, but of course nodding.

"It's settled then." Daddy sat back.

"But that's not fair," Marybeth rose, almost knocking over her chair. "She gets a live one and all I got was—"

"It's settled, dear." Ma's knitting needles stopped their clicking as she gazed at her daughter with creased blue eyes. Marybeth looked down at her boots, and then slumped into her chair.

"Well, take him outside and play with him." Daddy grinned at Sprokly.

"What you gonna do, little one?" Grampser asked, easing Sprokly from his knee.

Sprokly smiled until she knew her dimples showed. "I'm gonna make him teach me." She moved around the table and took Horton's hand. "All about horned toads."

Blinking again, with no more resistance than a newly setup relation, Horton rose. He shook his head, swallowed, and turned to Grampser. "You can't stop Science?"

"Course not, boy." Grampser smiled indulgently.

"Sprokly? Can I come with you?" Billy asked.

Sprokly looked at Billy. Her brother always seemed so serious. But not mean, at least. Not like Marybeth. The wideness of his eyes, the half afraid set of his mouth; she knew what it was like to want something real bad.

Besides, he was good at asking questions. Everyone said so, except Grampser, of course.

"Sure." She almost laughed at Billy's look of relief. Together, they led the still confused Horton stumbling into the early evening dusk.

Hand in hand, the three of them strolled through the shadows lengthening upon Main Street. Sunset blazed, all dark blues and deep oranges with glowing clouds and the first sprinkling of stars.

A relation ambled by, silent except for the whirring breath of machinery, a hoe in hand.

"Wha ..." Horton halted so Sprokly and Billy stopped. "What was he doing to me? I feel so ... strange."

"He was going to tune you." Billy shrugged. "Make you forget

what you seen here."

"Tune me," Horton dropped Sprokly's hand, gazed at her, and shivered. "I don't understand."

"Rewrite a bit of your mind," Billy explained, folding his arms. "He don't want you spreading tales about us."

"But that's scientifically impossible," Horton laughed, though it sounded uncertain, downright nervous to Sprokly.

"Not to Grampser, it isn't," Sprokly said. "And he taught Daddy One day he'll teach Billy and me how to do it."

"Marybeth already knows." Billy nodded. "I'd stay away from her if I were you."

"No problem," Horton murmured. "But how does it work?"

"They know the Secret of Making Brains." A note of pride entered Billy's voice. Sprokly straightened; she smiled. It was something important, after all.

"Glass," she told them.

"What?" Horton asked.

Billy just laughed. "That's what they told me too."

"Grampser and Daddy both agreed." Sprokly turned and faced her brother. "They both said it was glass."

"That should tell you something," Billy's voice took a smug tone like Marybeth's.

"What does glass have to do with brains?" Horton asked.

"I can't tell you." Billy glanced at Sprokly and shook his head. "It's something you have to figure out for yourself."

Sprokly scowled. Another Secret, she realized, just like The Truth of Perpetual Springs, which she had just learned led to self-winding machines.

The elders knew Secrets and gave out hints. Billy had discovered eighteen and Marybeth knew twenty. Sprokly had uncovered thirteen. The Maelzel family measured birthdays, not in years, but the number of Secrets discovered.

Once she'd tried to test First Cousin on Clockwork Beyond Kinetic. Billy had seen and only laughed. "Cousins," he'd told her, "couldn't learn."

Sprokly opened her mouth but Billy put his hand on Horton's shoulder and gently urged him on. "Tell us about Wichita Falls College must be fascinating."

"The greatest experience of my life," Horton's voice brightened. "I grew up in Quanah, you see. A little hick town hardly bigger than here. People there don't care much for education. But Wichita Falls, now that's a city. Anything can happen there, and I've learned so much."

"Such as?" Sprokly prompted and took his arm. They started walking again.

"Well, uh ... Binomial Classification, for one thing." Horton spread his hands. "That's how science divides all living things. You got your Animal Kingdom and your Plant Kingdom. Then they're divided into phyla, classes, orders, families, genus, and finally, species."

"How can there be only two kingdoms?" Sprokly asked. "Shouldn't there be at least three?"

"None that are important." Pride filled Horton's voice. The outsiders had their own kinds of Secrets, Sprokly decided.

"My my," a new voice slipped through the darkness. "What you got here, Sprokly?" A cousin appeared. Another took shape behind her, three more then, their smiles broad and shadow dark.

"Ya'll go on," Billy brandished his key at them. "Less someone needs winding."

"Oh, Marybeth wound us." First Cousin grinned. "We're tight and full of fun tonight." The others laughed. "Marybeth said you got a new toy. Can we play too?"

"Not just now." Sprokly stepped in front of Horton. At once Billy moved beside her, fists clenched.

First Cousin scowled. Second Cousin snapped a jump rope; the sound made Sprokly flinch. In the shadows behind them, Sprokly realized the other cousins were searching for rocks.

"Run!" she cried, turning and pushing Horton's shoulder. Horton caught on fast. The three of them dashed up the street. A rock hit the road tumbling past her. Another smacked the nearest wall. Grabbing Horton's arm, Sprokly zigzagged between the old general store and an empty house. Cousins cackled, lost in the darkness.

The river curved before them, a distant star sky mirror. When Sprokly felt the ground beneath her shoes turn spongy, she stopped.

"There ... we go," Billy slowed to a halt and gasped. "They won't follow us out here."

"Why not?" Horton panted beside them, doubled over, hands resting on his knees.

"Too much sand," Sprokly laughed. "It fusses with their joints."

The three of them eased down beside the river. Sprokly gazed up at the spread of stars and then noticed how they reflected in Horton's eyes. He was handsome in an educated way. A long chin, high forehead, delicate fingers that reminded her of Daddy's.

"Look, there's a horned toad." Billy pointed. Not far away on a sandy patch, a blackened oval with two red-bead eyes like mean stars studied them silently.

"That's the kind I was talking about," Horton whispered.

"Tell us about them," Sprokly demanded. "Tell us everything you know."

"There's not that much." Horton leaned back on his elbows.

"How do they fit into this Binomial Classification you mentioned?" Billy asked.

Horton grinned in the darkness. "Horned toads are in the genus Phrynosoma, family Iguanidae, suborder Sauria, order Squamata, class Reptilia."

There wasn't much more. Still, Horton had a way of talking that made even small things sound important and educated. They sat by the river, watching as the horned toads came out to suck up the warmth in the sand.

What would such a grand city as Wichita Falls be like? Sprokly wondered. Going to college with all its Secrets must be wonderful. She didn't ask many questions though, Billy always had better ones.

Someone had wound the television. Grampser, Daddy, and Marybeth had gathered around for the Ed Sullivan Show when Sprokly, Billy, and Horton came in. That Muppet act was on. A big green wobbly-eyed monster gobbled up a little yellow thing and beeped.

"Happy Birthday to you!" Ma burst through the kitchen door and waddled toward them, her gray hair bobbed with each step, her big-boned hands holding a tray.

"My cake!" Sprokly squealed, jumping up and down as the family rose singing. "You remembered!"

"You always let us forget." Grampser laughed.

"When the candles wind down, you can make your wish!" Daddy moved in close and put his arm around her.

Sprokly clasped her hands together and waited as the cut glass flames clicked back and forth. Within each flame-shaped shard of glass, Egyptian hieroglyphics for fire and creation danced, sending their shadowed images upon the white icing. As the candles slowed to a stop, she crossed her fingers and wished.

"There, I won't look," Grampser reached out to cup her chin. He frowned in concentration and stared into her eyes. Making a show of it, he flipped down the jeweler's lens and peered again.

"You didn't make a wish," Grampser muttered, "So you can't keep your new friend another day."

Everyone laughed and cheered except Horton, Sprokly noticed—and Marybeth crowed a sarcastic yippee.

"Let's cut the cake now!" Billy took one end of the tray and helped Ma carry it over to the table. Ma produced a knife from her apron and began cutting a big square of cake.

"You should try this cake, boy." Grampser put his hand on Horton's shoulder. "It's good for you."

"You're crazy if you think I'm putting *that* in my mouth." Horton eyed the cake, head shaking.

A SPECIAL MERCEDES LACKEY DOUBLE EVENT

FROM DAW BOOKS

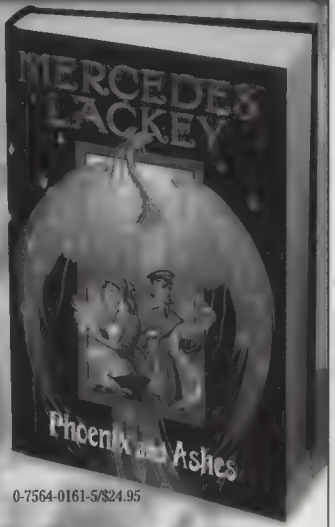
All-new hardcover in her highly-acclaimed *Elemental Masters* historical fantasy series!

"[Lackey] turns her hand to historical fantasy in this intriguing and compelling re-creation of England in the waning days of its imperial glory."
—Library Journal

Following her acclaimed novels *The Serpent's Shadow* and *The Gates of Sleep*, Mercedes Lackey reinvents a classic fairy tale—and gives it a new twist. In a dark and atmospheric retelling of Cinderella, she sets her story in London during the first World War.

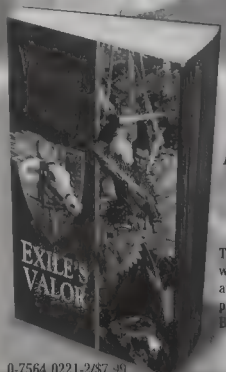
Praise for *The Gates of Sleep*:
"With colorful characters, Lackey makes her variation of the Sleeping Beauty story great fun to read."
—Booklist

"Fully fleshed out and credible. This is a wonderful example of a new look at an old theme."
—Publishers Weekly



0-7564-0161-5/$24.95

Don't miss the previous books in the *Elemental Masters* series:
The Gates of Sleep
0-7564-01011/$6.99
The Serpent's Shadow
0-7564-0061-9/$6.99



0-7564 0221-2/$7.99

A Major Valdemar Novel—Now in Paperback!

"Once you jump into this world, you'll find yourself immediately involved, surrounded by new friends, and glad you made the trip."
—Realms of Fantasy

This stand alone novel in the Valdemar series continues the story of prickly weapons-master Alberich. Once a heroic Captain in the army of Karse, a Kingdom at war with Valdemar, Alberich becomes one of Valdemar's Heralds. Despite prejudice against him, he becomes the personal protector of young Queen Selenay. But can he protect her from the dangers of her own heart?

Also available:
Exile's Honor 0 7564 0113 5/$6.99

DAW Books, Inc.
Distributed by Penguin Group (USA)
Visit DAW online at www.dawbooks.com

Available wherever books are sold

Billy turned to Horton. Pale Horton——even in shadow, his face had grown pallid. Sweat beaded his forehead as he looked her up and down.

Grampser scowled at him and even Daddy frowned.

"I mean," Horton pulled at his shirt collar, "no thank you."

"Politeness matters to all creatures," Ma nodded appreciatively. She spooned a big piece into Sprokly's mouth. Sprokly tried to gnn but couldn't quite close her lips around the gooey mass Icing caked her lips and when she finally managed to swallow, she licked them with her tongue.

Presents came next Ma had knitted her a gorgeous sweater, just like one they'd seen Jacqueline Kennedy wearing on Walter Cronkite's news

"Here's my gift," Marybeth offered a package covered in aluminum foil. Sprokly quickly tore the wrapping away. "A bndle? I don't understand."

"I'm giving you my pony," Marybeth smiled. "After all, it's more your size than mine now. Besides, my birthday comes up next."

"She wants a car," Billy added Grampser laughed and winked at Daddy

"Take the pony, grl," Daddy said.

Billy's gift was a pair of golden spectacles, a series of ever-finer jeweler's loops soldered to the rim. "I made this myself," he told Sprokly. "You'll be starting in the workshop soon, just like me."

Sprokly hugged Billy and then, just as suddenly as it had begun, the party ended.

"Bedtime everyone." Ma stood and took Sprokly's empty plate.

"It's way too early," Grampser agreed.

"Horton, you'll bed down in Billy's room." Dad gave the young man a hard stare

"But Daddy," Sprokly started, "He's my—"

"You're certainly old enough to have a young man spend the night with you." Grampser wagged a finger Marybeth giggled and Sprokly knew her cheeks had gone red.

With that and a few more happy birthdays, everyone went to their rooms. Sprokly grinned as she changed into her nightshirt Her presents glittered in a pile on the bed table

She was so lucky. Not just Marybeth's pony that she'd always coveted, but Horton got to stay another day. Tomorrow she'd find out more about horned toads and colleges, all the Secrets that Horton knew. Billy would help

She listened to the thumps and footfalls that came from Billy's room, the creaking of springs from Grampser's bed, and the soft music from Marybeth's radio

Just as she climbed into bed, the radio shut off. A moment later, the lights wound down, darkening first to a golden gloom, and then vanishing.

Moonlight fell across Sprokly's bed, forming shadows through curtain patterns that left obscure symbols floating on the rose-colored chenille

More than the sum, one symbol meant. Greater than the whole. Be one with your family. Live!

Why had she never noticed these before?

Sprokly stretched, glanced at her presents, and tried to decide what had awoken her A moment later, a shadow slipped past the window She sat up and looked out, just as a second shadow eased by.

Cousins, she thought, and was about to lie back down when curiosity got the better of her. She slipped from the bed in time to see Billy and Horton round the corner of the house

"They're going without me," she whispered. "That's not fair "

Quietly she dressed, then inched the window open, and slipped through. A warm summer night, the steady song of crickets and a lonely cicada rasped melodic from the mesquite trees.

Billy and Horton moved silently, black blurs that blocked the distant glittering river. Sprokly hurried after them

"Hey!" she whispered, loud as she dared once they'd reached the edge of town. "Hey wait for me!"

Billy halted mid-stride. Horton, a few steps behind him, slowed and turned. They gazed at her, faces half lit by the quarter moon, half shadowed like harlequins

"I'm sorry, sis " Billy spread his hands, refusing to meet her eyes as she padded over the still warm sand

"Where you guys going?" she asked.

Horton only shook his head, staring at her, a half-scared, half-embarrassed look on his face.

"I'm leaving." Billy hitched a thumb in his jeans. His other hand, Sprokly realized, clutched a small suitcase. "I'm going with Horton. I'm gonna see Wichita Falls, maybe even get into college "

Horton swallowed, glanced at Billy, and nodded.

"But you can't do that " Sprokly grabbed his elbow. "What'll Grampser do? What will Daddy say?"

"There's too much to learn in this world." Billy shook his arm free. "Too much out there. And I'm eighteen. I can do what I want." His voice dropped to a whisper. "I'm a man, you know A real one "

"Well then," Sprokly put her hands on her hips, "I'm coming with you. Just for a little while, I mean. A couple days to see what a city is really like "

Billy turned to Horton Pale Horton—even in shadow, his face had grown pallid. Sweat beaded his forehead as he looked her up and down. He swallowed again and stared at Billy. "You've *got* to be kidding."

"I'm sorry, sis." Billy leaned close and kissed her cheek. "I guess you're just too young."

Horton giggled, as strange a giggle as Sprokly had ever heard. "Come on," he managed "Before those dog things notice."

The two of them dashed down into the river, splashing across the shallows to the other side. Sprokly watched until the darkness swallowed them Her eyes burned. Her fingers clenched and unclenched

"I suppose they're still here."

Sprokly whirled "Grampser!"

"Of course not," he answered, limping up to gaze across the river

"Are you gonna let them go?" she asked.

Grampser smiled, but it wasn't the smile Sprokly knew; it looked more like First Cousin's cold grin. She started to speak, but he lifted a hand

The dog's howling sirens erupted from the darkness, followed by the shrieking glee of the cousins, and then an all too human scream of pain. The night died into the silence of a few meager crickets

"You knew," Sprokly whispered. "You knew all the time."

Grampser shrugged. "Some things aren't meant to happen " He chuckled, low in his throat. "Some are."

Sprokly gasped. If Grampser never told the truth, then what he'd just said made no sense. Had Daddy spoken those same words, she wouldn't have understood either. How could something be true and not true?

She started to ask, but what came out instead was, "Billy? Is he all right?"

Continued on page 92

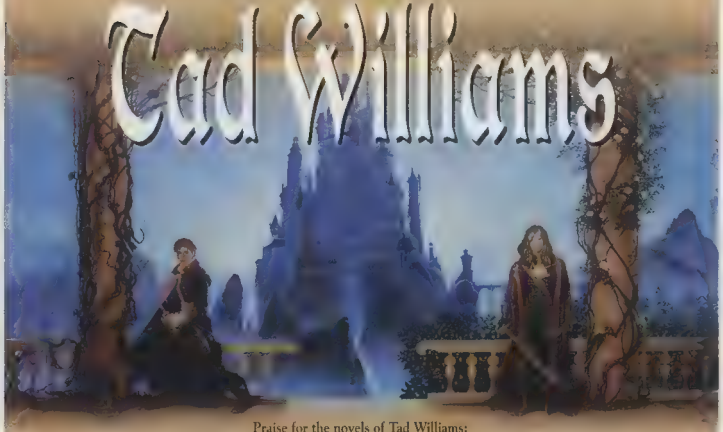
DAW IS THRILLED TO ANNOUNCE THE
PUBLISHING EVENT OF THE YEAR

The *New York Times* best-selling author of *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn*
makes his grand return to high fantasy with a new epic trilogy...

Shadowmarch

**The book that fans have been awaiting
for over a decade from internationally acclaimed author**

Tad Williams



Praise for the novels of Tad Williams:

"An accomplished and ambitious fantasist."—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Tad Williams's imagination is boundless."—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"Williams has a supremely powerful imagination." —*Booklist*

"A master storyteller." —*Interzone*

"I'm not sure what Williams will try next,
but it's clear that wherever he's going, it's worth following..."
—*The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*

Volume 1 available in hardcover, November 2004, from DAW

talent

`When you've got the gift, sometimes you have to give it to someone else– even if you don't want to.

By Laura Anne Gilman
Illustration by Michael Gibbs

SPRINGSTEEN'S ON THE RADIO, SINGING ABOUT ATLANTIC City. I've got chalk on my hands, the eight ball in my sights, and the music of the game filling my ears. Story has it the soft clank-clank-clank of the balls was supposed to have driven old Eddie mad. I don't know but that it's true. Don't know that it isn't, either.

I suppose it would have made a better story if he'd eviscerated himself with his cue stick, won one final grudge match too many and been left bleeding in an alley, or been dragged into a padded truck late one night, giggling madly, frothing at the mouth. A lot of players end up that way. Those that don't just one day fold up and take off

But Eddie didn't do any of those things. In fact, he's over there in the corner. Still in the same chair he always took.

Is it possible to haunt a place without dying? 'Cause Eddie just won't go away

After the game, I walk the floor, nodding to the regulars. Twelve tables, full-up on a Thursday night Pauline's at the bar; four beers on tap, plus spirits. We don't mix anything fancier than scotch and soda or a gin and tonic. The Billiard Club doesn't cater to post-boom yuppies or fresh-faced college students looking to get a thrill It's just old timers in here, the serious players looking to make their chops, and a few kids who might someday make it to the serious level.

And Eddie

He was the best, back in the day. Way back. And this dive was his throne room. I remember when he used to tousle my hair for luck, back when I had some. But you're supposed to let go, when the glory fades. Time for someone else to take center stage. Have their moment in the sun. Be top dog. Eddie wouldn't let go.

Now he sits there, night in and night out. I don't know where he goes when the sun comes up. I don't want to know, either He smells of mothballs and dirt, and Robbie, our sad excuse for a mouser, turns aside and hisses when he comes in. That's enough for me. But he's an old-timer, Eddie is. You're supposed to show respect. Besides, crosses and garlic don't keep him out, and we were getting weird looks, so I had Pauline take 'em down. This is a pool hall, not some prissy-assed uptight place. So long as he doesn't bother anyone, I got no cause to throw him out.

But he creeps me Especially the way he watches the new players. Like we're old news, no threat, but one of these kids might be the samba come to rumble for his throne

If he makes problems, I'll throw his rickety bones out, I swear I will But until then, I don't want to touch him. Literally

"Rack 'em, Johnny!"

I gather the balls, sort 'em, and rack 'em. My partner breaks. We're playing a new pair, older guy, young girl. She's good, quick with her eyes and slow with her hands. Talent. Everyone can see it. Other than that, not much to the package Not pretty, but not mud-ugly, either Everyday Normal Everything about her's average .. except when she leans into the table Then you see the magic

I look up at the thought. Sure enough, Eddie's watching And he knows I'm watching him watching her, and he grins, showing yellowing, worn-down teeth, jagged in places, upper and lower, like they broke on something too hard to chew

Stay away from her, Eddie I wait for a shiver to run up or down my spine Nothing. Just his old-man eyes and old-man teeth, the taste of obsession like grit under my skin

She's oblivious Moving in a world that's peaceful and serene as she runs the table, baby powder cool. Not in it for the money, that's clear. You don't hustle that way. She picks a pocket, leans, shoots, and grimaces, embarrassed, as she misses Her partner—father? Teacher? Maybe both—gives her a good-natured thwack on the shoulder. Only God makes every shot I chalk up, eye the table And I forget about Eddie for the time it takes for me to sink my ball

I've got chalk on my hands, the eight ball in my sights, and the music of the game filling my ears.

The threats of a pool hall are clear, anyhow. Too much booze Drugs Sleazy operators looking for a score. We run a clean shop, far as all that goes Eddie's harmless. Crazy, yeah, but a pansy slap would break him in two.

When I look up again, he's gone

PAULINE BRINGS ME ANOTHER BEER, COLD AND DRY. ANOTHER game, and we're starting to get spectators The girl shakes a little under the pressure, but gives us a good run before sinking the eight ball in the wrong pocket She's fourteen, her name's Betsy, and the guy's her uncle, Mike He knows what he's got there—also knows he doesn't know enough to challenge her the way she needs Half the room's adopted her already. I don't want her here No reason for that no reason at all

Eddie's gone, anyway. I try not to wonder why he left so early

Betsy's grin is sweet and crooked, mostly a little bit shy when she's challenged by Maxie. Older than dirt, Maxie can't play worth a damn, but he can flirt like Casanova Can make a girl-child feel like it wouldn't be so bad to be a woman, someday. Mike plays watchdog, hovering, but the young boys stay away. They don't want anything to do with her She's too sharp, too bright, too overwhelming. It takes age to subdue the ego enough to handle talent like that

I watch her make a shot, and admit to myself maybe I'm not that old after all. My ego stirs, and I shove it back down She's got a future, if she wants it Not everyone does. I take a long pull off my beer. My ambition hadn't always been to run a pool hall, but it's not a bad life. I like the hours. I like the people. Mostly

And ten slides into midnight, and midnight slides into two, and Pauline starts shooing the last stragglers out. We could run all night, but the crowd you get then isn't something I want to encourage Two AM is fine Everyone go to bed.

Betsy says her last goodbyes, yawning, staggering a little against Mike's arm. He drapes her coat over her shoulder, smiles good night, steers her out the door, across the deserted street. Even talent's got to sleep

I step outside while Pauline shuts down the bar, take a deep breath of summer air. Humid-thick and filled with exhaust, it's still the cleanest thing I've inhaled in hours. I shake a cig out of the pack that's been untouched in my pocket all evening, rummage for a match. Turn, my eye caught by something, some movement. Some smell

The fog of mothballs and the tang of fresh dirt.

"Eddie " There's no response My gut clenches. "Leave her alone, Eddie "

What the hell am I saying? Hallucinating, old man But there's something in the air that feels like a building falling, pressure in the ears and against your chest, and dust in your eyes and gristle between your teeth

I could be imagining it. Probably am. But maybe not. I toss the cigarette down and shove my head back in the door, yell to Pauline I'll be back in a minute

I trot down the street, trying to remember what Mike had said Where do they live?

I'll look a fool if nothing's wrong. That's OK. Let everything be OK, and, well, everything'll be OK.

I cross against the light on Osborne, jog up Parkhurst. The city's still humming, but it's a quieted sound. The lion may not sleep, but his belly is full. Row after row of brick-faced buildings, their windows wrought in iron, their lobbies fluorescent-lit. My shoe leather taps on concrete, like it's mocking the beat of my heart I'm too old to chase after young girls, no matter how prodigious their talent

No matter how hungry Eddie's eyes have been.

No matter how scared I am.

There. Half a block ahead. Is that something behind them? *Leave her alone, Eddie! Let her have her turn* I'm thinking nonsense. Babbling inside my skull Under a street lamp, then into the shadows again They pause, Mike stumbles, Betsy grabs his arm, steadies him. They pause again .. he kneels Something's wrong .. is he tying a shoe? I catch up to him, and that's what he's doing

"Mr. Wasserman!" Mike looks up at Betsy's surprised greeting, his face flickering—fear, recognition, wariness I pause, keeping a safe distance away.

"I'm sorry Didn't mean to scare you folks."

"Something wrong? Did we leave something behind?" He's watching me now, his eyes puzzled

"No, it's ... I thought I saw someone following you, when you left." Truth, and nothing but the truth "I just wanted to make sure you were OK. It's late, and ..." I grin. "And Betsy's got too much talent in those hands to be fending off a would-be mugger."

Mike chuckles at that. "Thanks, but we're fine Home safe home," and he gestures at the building two doors down.

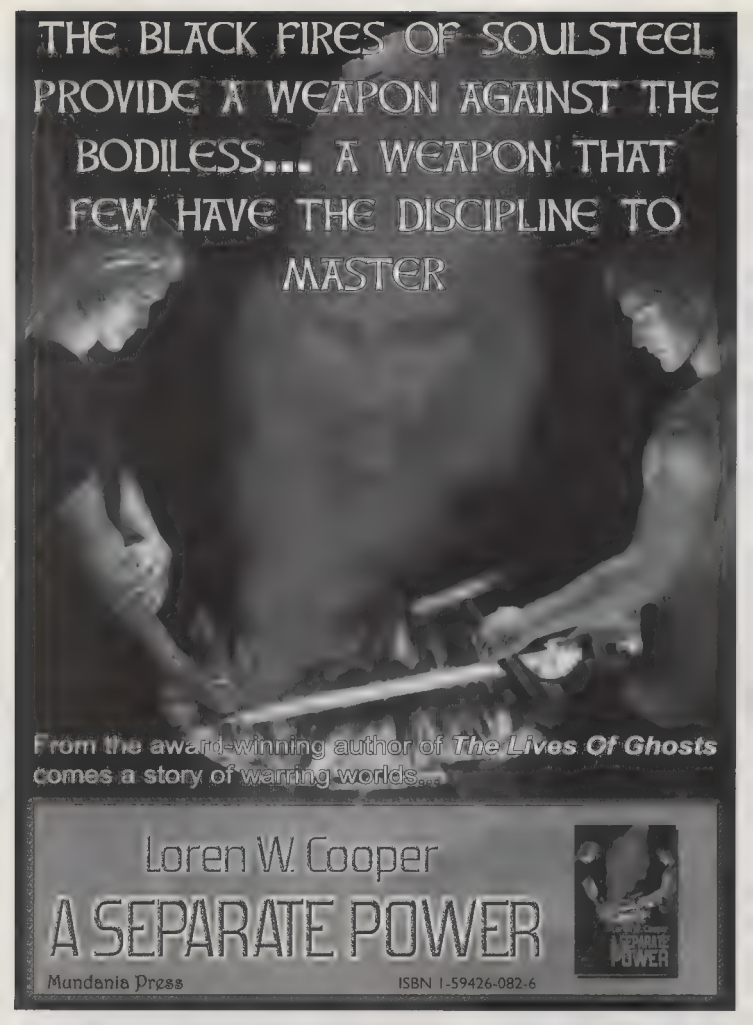
"All right then." I feel foolish. Too many late nights. And it's not as though Eddie was the kind to hurt anyone. Even when he wasn't the way he is now. So the old man wasn't the kind to go out without a fight. What could he do, anyway?

And then I smell it again. Mothballs. And dirt. And the fading tang of baby powder.

I look up, and Mike is turning away, his arm still around Betsy's shoulders And she looks back at me . and grins

An old man's ragged-edged grin.

Damn you, Eddie


THE BLACK FIRES OF SOULSTEEL PROVIDE A WEAPON AGAINST THE BODILESS... A WEAPON THAT FEW HAVE THE DISCIPLINE TO MASTER
From the award-winning author of The Lives Of Ghosts comes a story of warring worlds...
Loren W. Cooper
A SEPARATE POWER
Mundania Press
ISBN 1-59426-082-6

By Eric T. Baker

DragonMech serves up a world of medieval fantasy with a twist.

A completely different take on mechs is ***DragonMech*** from White Wolf for use with the d20 paper and dice role playing system. This book lays out of a world of medieval fantasy that is dominated by giant mechs that are powered by steam, magic, or the labor of a thousand slaves. Unlike *FMA*, where the mechs are 30-to 40-foot, single-pilot machines, *DM*'s mechs range from single-person power suits to city mechs with thousands of inhabitants. There is an elven city mech made from great trees, and necromechs are constructed with the animated body parts of great monsters.

In the world of *DragonMech*, the moon broke from its orbit and spiraled toward the earth, raining moon rocks and dangerous moon creatures. All the races tried to escape the deadly rain by moving underground, but there were only so many deep places to go. Much fighting and death ensued, until a great dwarven engineer provided the plan for the first city mech, which could not only survive the lunar rain, but could also crush the monsters that were coming with it. The creation of the city mechs spurred an entire mech industry and, now that the lunar rains have ended, the world is becoming a place of adventure.

The main difference between *DM* and traditional mech games, besides the medieval setting, is that its mechs are not nimble and smooth. They are clumsy and lurching, but also huge and unstoppable. The 236 pages of the *DM* book do a good job of laying out the world and providing enough examples of mechs, weapons, devices, and monsters, to say nothing of the classes and prestige classes, plus the racial and political write-ups. There is no prepared scenario included, but there are lots of possibilities for adventure.

ABOVE Giant mechanized robots do battle in White Wolf's latest RPG ABOVE RIGHT The DragonMech *world blends medieval fantasy with the futuristic*

The paper and dice role-playing game ***Deliria: Faerie Tales for a New Millennium,*** is from Laughing Pan Productions by longtime White Wolf writer and designer Phil Brucato. It is also quite possibly the most beautiful RPG book ever made. There are 360 glossy pages in full color, crammed full of incredibly good art framed by page layouts that are imaginative but readable. The book is so good looking that

Pursue Your Fantasies...

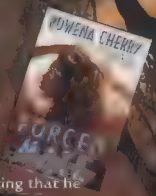
DREAM WEAVER - S.A. Martin
www.shirleymartin.net
Sent back in time, Gwen must save her lover's life. She failed him once before. Can she steal him again?

ONE MORE TOMORROW - S.A. Martin
www.shirleymartin.net
Destined to live in darkness, Graham must defeat the demon Moloch to regain mortality and win the love of the mortal woman, Stephanie.

Erotic and Paranormal Romance

FORCED MATE - Rowena Beaumont Cherry
www.booksurge.com
"...one of the best science fiction romances I've read." - Rendezvous Review, romancejunkies.com

From Scorching Love Spell, in bookstores Nov 2nd 2005



FORCED MATE - Rowena Cherry
www.rowenacherry.com
What was a god-Emperor to do when his chosen mate was caught on tape speculating that he was a brute and a bore in bed?

"A fantastically original page turner." - Susan Krinard, NYT bestselling author of The Scarlet Empress

WINTERTIDE - Linnea Sinclair
www.starfreighter.com
One of them knows the truth. One of them is seeking, just as she is sought. The war of dark magicks is about to end...

"An captivating novel, Sinclair's fluid prose and intrepid heroine ensure an enchanting read." --Publisher's Weekly

BEYOND THE MUNDANE: FLIGHTS OF MIND
Editor: Daniel J. Reitz
www.mundania.com
Fantasy & SF anthology with 29 tales of shapeshifters, dream lovers, cyborgs, dragonly stratagem, planetary hellholes, vampires, memory wipes, and more!

Available at Amazon.com and fine bookstores everywhere
Visit our author and publisher websites for chapter excerpts and more

a simple way to draft players might be to just lay it on a coffee table and wait for visitors to start thumbing through it. Most of them have probably never seen a game like this

A game of urban fantasy in the tradition of Charles de Lint's Newford novels, *Delirta* is a very deliberate departure from the *Swords and Sorcery/Dungeons & Dragons* style of fantasy games. Instead, it focuses on the faerie tale tradition of fantasy. The game has so much to explain about its setting, characters and style that readers are four chapters and a couple hundred pages into the book before they encounter any rules, although there are pointers in the text to the relevant rules for those who want to skip ahead. Phil's hope, as stated in his notes, is that people won't skip ahead. He wants them to read the book and get an understanding of and a hunger for the setting before they confuse the issue by adding the resolution system

Oddly enough, *Delirta* is such a departure from other RPGs, it may actually be easier for players who are new to role-playing to pick up and play than it is for more experienced players who are likely to focus on what isn't included (such as a bestiary and a sample adventure) rather than what is. Similarly, a new player may be more likely to take the system's card based, "one draw, one result" system at face value rather than trying to make it fit their prejudices. *Delirta* is a beautiful, game for everyone, and an entertaining one

A host of interesting characters and endless possibility awaits players in DragonMech

for those are ready to play it on its own terms

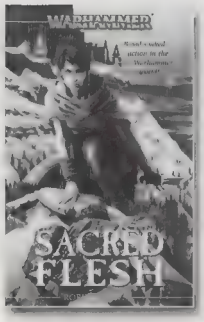
Mech tales are different and more modern sort of genre. Mech is the generic term for giant fighting robots, whether they can transform into cars or not. The vast majority of mech games cast the player in the role of the pilot, directing the giant fighting machine around the battlefield. ***Front Mission 4***, the new PS2 game from Square Enix, the makers of the *Final Fantasy* series, takes a different tact. It places the character in a command role, directing several Mechs at once. The player also guides the development of the mechs and their pilots, earning experience points in each battle and spending them between battles on upgrades, hardware, and skills

Set in the near future and six years after the previous game, *FM4* tells the story of Elsa, who is French, and Darril, from the United Confederate States, who separately (at first) become embroiled in a global conspiracy, the foiling of which requires many, many battles between wanzers, as the mechs in this game are called. Wanzers have four parts: right and left arm, body, and legs. Each part takes damage separately and mounts different weapons. The combat is turn-based, so the players move and resolve each of their mechs in turn, then the computer does all of its units

Square built its reputation on excellent cut scenes and good music. There are more of the former than the latter in *FM4*. There is also lots of dialog to X button through and the game can only be saved in between fights–two more Square hallmarks. The game by itself is clean and easy to learn. While the player has to level the characters, there are no in battle resources to manage, so play is all about combat and the combat is tense and well animated. This is good because it is possible to skip the animations of the wanzers lumbering about the battlefield, but the there is no way to skip the animations of them actually shooting at each other. Overall, a fun game with a long, involving story

Sly 2: Band of Thieves for the PS2 by Sucker Punch and from SCEA continues the adventures of Sly Cooper, the racoon cat bur

NEW FICTION FROM THE BLACK LIBRARY



SACRED FLESH

Acclaimed author Robin D Laws is on top of his game in this gritty murder mystery that mixes the dark fantasy of the Warhammer world with edge-of-your-seat action!

1-84416-091-2 • $7.99

'Superior dark fantasy from the grim world of Warhammer.'
– LOCUS

BUY IT NOW!
Available from all better bookstores!

www.blacklibrary.com

RAISE THE TOWNSFOLK

An Epic Adventure from Master of Fantasy, T. A. Barron,

author of the bestselling Lost Years of Merlin saga!

Merlin planted the seed that could become the greatest world in Avalon. Now, though, Avalon is suffering and its fate rests with only one person. Will it be the [illegible] of Merlin, the only person who can save Avalon, or will it be the crowned child of the Dark Prophecy, fated to destroy it?

★ [illegible] on his popular Lost Years of Merlin saga, creates [illegible] Avalon's world[illegible]. All the while it is a rousing new fantasy [illegible]

[illegible] Avalon [illegible] and wonder of [illegible] and [illegible] reminds us of the fragility and wonder of [illegible]

[illegible] The story stayed with me, and renewed my hope for humanity.

To learn more about T.A. Barron and his books, go to www.tabarron.com

Available now wherever books are sold.

Philomel Books
a division of Penguin Young Readers Group
www.penguin.com/youngreaders

glar and master thief, that were first presented in the 2002 PS2 game, *Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus*. In the first game, Sly and his friends defeated the evil, immortal, mechanized thief, Clockwork. This time, Clockwork's remains have been stolen, and Sly is afraid the monster will be reanimated. His friends are Bentley the turtle and Murray the hippo, who comprise the brains and the brawn of the outfit, respectively. Basically, Slay does the sneaking, Bentley does the wiring, and Murray does the smashing, but the game mixes the roles up on some levels, making Bentley sneak for instance, to keep things unpredictable.

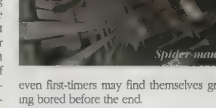
With its anthropomorphic animal characters and cell-shaded graphics, *Sly* has the look of a kid's game, and in fact the lack of cursing or adult situations does make it a fine game for younger members of the family, but not too young. While not a hardcore stealth or action game, *Sly* has elements of both. It requires both good reflexes and a lot of patience to clear levels in the game, particularly those where Sly is trying to follow someone and avoid guards. That said, the controls are pretty forgiving. To tightrope walk, for instance, the player just jumps. *Sly* over the wire and presses the circle button. The game lands the raccoon on the wire and keeps him there until the player jumps him off.

The entertainment value of the game is enhanced by a cast of distinctive players, including Inspector Carmelita Fox, who, even when she arrives ahead of *Sly*, always seems to be a step behind him. The game play is broken up by frequent cut scenes, some 2-D, that move the story along and build the characters. Overall, *Sly* is a well made and entertaining package for gamers of most ages.

The fact that a game is a movie tie-in no longer gives any immediate clue as to whether it is a good game or not. Some have been very good, like *The Chronicles of Riddick*, and some haven't been, like *Enter the Matrix*. The new ***Spider-man 2*** game for the PC from Activision has more in common with the latter. The graphics are subpar for a PC game, and the actual play is so simplified that it isn't clear what age group the game is targeted for.

Unlike the movie, the game doesn't spend much time dwelling on Peter Parker. The focus is on Spider-man and his battle against crime. After a quick tutorial, the player is given the task of having Spidey stop a jailbreak, which gets more complicated when the Rhino appears as one of the escapees. Rhino joins Mysterio and the Puma as classic Spidey villains that are in the game, but not the film. There is a loose plot that tries to tie all the villains and events together, while also trying to contain the events of the movie and the battles with Doc Ock.

Compared to many action games, and considering that the primary of focus of the action is swinging from webs, *Spiderman 2* is very easy to play. The buildings in the game's New York sequences have web targets on them. The player just moves the cursor near the targets, clicks, and Spidey shoots his next web, then keeps on swinging. Fighting is equally simple, the player just clicks again when Spidey is near a villain. The tutorial is remarkably short, which is actually a shame since Bruce Cambell narrates it. Perhaps designed for people who don't usually play video games, *Spider-man 2* doesn't have the complexity to challenge the average gamer, and



even first-timers may find themselves growing bored before the end.

Speaking of movie tie-ins, the latest supplement to Wizards of the Coast's paper and dice *Star Wars Role playing Game* is *Ultimate Adversaries*. The book contains 160 pages of villains, scoundrels, and monsters to challenge the players in a campaign set in any of the three *Star Wars* eras. The book contains no villains who appeared in the movies, those characters have all been written up in previous supplements. These bad guys are new, made-for-the-game adversaries. In addition to the characters, there are also seven pages of new rules at the back of the book.

Each individual adversary gets a head shot, full stats, and an equipment write-up, as well as description, role-playing tips, and notes on playing them to each era of the game. The various creatures get the same treatment. There are also write-ups of generic organizations (a typical swoop gang for example) with descriptions and templates of generic members. The creature section has special rules on creatures and a rule that lets the GM create his or her own.

Ultimate Adversaries is not a must have book because it doesn't contain characters from the movies, but it is a terrificly handy supplement. The variety of characters and monsters and droids will save GMs lots of dice rolling as their campaigns continue and expand. ❧

making brains

Continued from page 82

"Yes and no." Grampser folded his arms and studied her.

"But which is it?"

"What do you think?"

Sprokly stared into the darkness. She wanted to run to her brother but couldn't seem to get her legs working. She couldn't move; yet if she stood still for one more second her screams would never end.

"The answer is clear, girl." Grampser's chuckle sounded like a wounded thing. "Clear as glass."

With a wordless cry, Sprokly jerked away from him and fell to her knees. She stared into the blackness. It burned her eyes, burned them as if she gazed into the white hot sun.

"Clear as glass," she murmured. Some things were neither black nor white, true nor false, did a third possibility exist?

"Clear enough for you?" Sharpness edged Grampser's laughter.

Sprokly blinked and the darkness vanished. Colors vanished. In the distance, Sprokly saw her father, a fleshless, crystalline manikin, bending over Billy, equally transparent, sobbing in his arms. Swarms of see-through cousins and dogs clustered around a translucent body.

Sprokly looked up at Grampser who'd grown clear as glass, right down to the throbbing jewel of a heart. Abruptly she blinked and the night turned dark again.

"The secret of making brains is to use good quality glass," she murmured. "It provides clarity. Some things can never be all true, or all false. Clarity brings new choices."

Grampser reached into his pocket and drew out a tuning spork. He held it out to her. "Happy birthday, all over again."

Sprokly laughed. Rising, she lifted the device and spun its cogs.

Stars became letters. The glittering of the river sparkled and focused into words. Out of the darkness, red-bead eyes appeared, horned toad eyes that blinked and, within what was written there, Sprokly understood even more. Clarity let one see beyond mere taxonomies: what bugs tasted like, how good warm sand felt, the sensation of claws skittering over rocks.

"You made them," her finger extended, pointing at the nearest pair of red-bead eyes.

Grampser reached down and the horned toad crawled obediently into his hand. He held it up until its twin horns glinted in the moonlight.

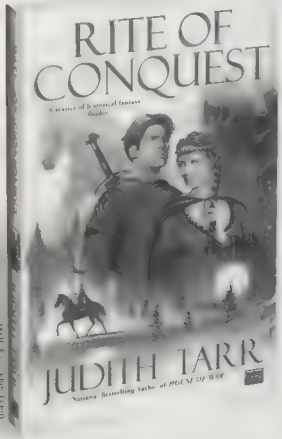
"Do you understand?" it asked in a squeaky ratchet voice.

"Kingdom Machina," she whispered, shivering.

"Girl," Grampser gently stroked her cheek, fingers moving up to the fastening screws of her skull top. "You might just be right." ❧

JUDITH TARR IS THE "MASTER OF HISTORICAL FANTASY"*

"Tarr smoothly blends a dazzling array of characters from both history and myth...such is the quality of her prose that no extravagance seems forced."
—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)



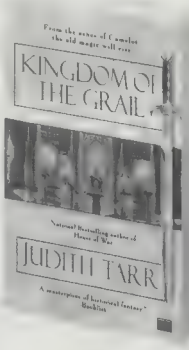
IN NORMANDY, WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR IS BORN...

William has earned respect on the battlefield, but his temper and his disregard for his magical abilities hold him back. He needs a teacher, whether he wants one or not—and finds her in the beautiful French noblewoman Mathilda.

In an epic battle that spans worlds and ages, magical forces and earthbound armies will be drawn together by William as he fights to achieve his destiny—to rule England.

AFTER ARTHUR, AFTER CAMELOT, MERLIN REMAINS...

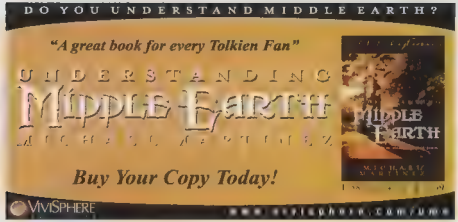
Roland is a knight and warrior who has sworn to free the wizard Merlin, imprisoned within an enchanted forest since the fall of Camelot. Now, with the help of a beautiful Saracen healer and a magical sword, Roland must face his test, fulfill his oath—and find his destiny....

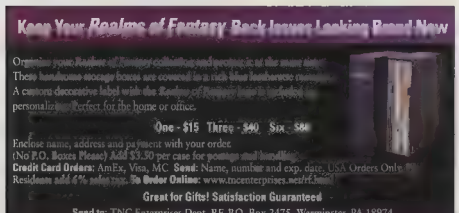


AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK FROM ROC
A member of Penguin Group (USA)
www.penguin.com

*Booklist

Generation 2
Swords Designed for Steel-to-Steel™
IP-037-2
Chaos Sword
Under special contract with the foundry, we have developed specifications that can only be called Generation2. The manufacturer is now producing the new swords (unlike any they have ever produced) with all new specifications, and a new tempering process that will truly make the Generation2 swords ready to win the Steel-to-Steel SM challenge.
IP-035-2
Excalibur
www.imperialweapons.com
IP-090-2 Twin Elven Daggers
Limited Numbered Edition
Only 800 numbered pieces worldwide
Back scabbard included.
For contact information:
Imperial Weapons
88 Foxworth Dr.
Jackson, TN 38305
731-664-5774
imperial@imperialweapons.com
Contracted as the exclusive distributor for Gen.2




Keep Your Realms of Fantasy Back Issues Looking Brand New
Organize your Realms of Fantasy collecting and keeping it in the years to come.
These handsome storage boxes are covered in a rich blue leathervette material.
A custom decorative label with the Realms of Fantasy logo is included for personalizing. Perfect for the home or office.
One - $15 Three - $40 Six - $80
Enclose name, address and payment with your order.
(No P.O. Boxes Please) Add $3.50 per case for postage and handling.
Credit Card Orders: AmEx, Visa, MC. Send name, number and exp. date. USA Orders Only.
Residents add 6% sales tax. To Order Online: www.tncenterprises.net/rf.html
Great for Gifts! Satisfaction Guaranteed
Send to: TNC Enterprises Dept. RF, P.O. Box 2475, Warminster, PA 18974

chamber of forgetting

Continued from page 62

Damn, I still have to change." Benedic stands up, checks his sword. "See that Matt is put safely back in his cell, Derran."

"Yes, sir. Happy to, sir." Derran grins then steps back as he sees the look on Benedic's face.

"Don't be happy about it, boy. Just do your duty."

Derran stiffens. "Yes, sir." He grasps Matt's shoulder and pulls him from Benedic's office. In silence, they march back to the cell.

During the night, Matt sits against the wall opposite the bed, watching the stars track past his small square of window. His thoughts are interrupted by a nearly inaudible snicking sound from the door. He gets quietly to his feet.

The door slides open. A shadowy figure slips into the room, darting toward the bed. Finding it empty, he whirls, but Matt has already slipped behind him. Matt pokes the intruder in the ribs and dances away as he whirls again.

The figure speaks in a language both liquid and staccato, like water running over sharp rocks. Matt hears his own name repeated twice as the words resolve themselves into meaning. "—and then, Mattamdar, you must kill your guards and that captain and try to get to the king." The figure thrusts something smooth and cold—a dagger—into Matt's hands.

No," Matt says quietly. He allows the weapon to clatter to the floor. If there is one thing he knows, it is that he will not kill Captain Benedic or Derran or Felice's father.

The figure steps away, pushes back the black hood. In the darkness, Matt can barely make out a pale, sharp featured face that he doesn't recognize. "You obey me not," says the man in a cold voice. "Then it is true, Mattamdar. You have become Velonn."

No."

"It is enough. The Salvandi's voice is thick with hatred, disgust. He spits. Matt wipes his face with a shaking hand. "A Salvandi succeeds at his mission or dies. You live even though you have failed. You are a traitor to your people. And with a lithe movement, the Salvandi is gone, leaving the dagger behind him.

During the night, in the darkness, Matt's knowing fingers find the dagger; he feels its familiar weight, feels how it settles comfortably into his hand. He knows this weapon.

In the morning, Matt stands up stiffly from the wall, looks away from the window where dawn is rising, and shoves the dagger into his pocket. The guards bring him breakfast, but

he cannot eat it. When the captain comes for him, he is ready.

Benedic opens the door and motions the guards away. "All right, Matt, it's time." He looks his prisoner up and down, looks away when he sees Matt's hands. "I suppose you've figured out what is happening."

Matt nods. If the Velorin cannot carry out their original plan, they'll find some other way to use him against the Salvandi.

"Yes, you would," Benedic says quietly. "I'll do what I can, you understand?"

Matt nods again.

Benedic calls out the cell door. "Derran, let's get him out of here."

Derran, eager as always, rushes into the cell. "All right, sir, I'm ready." He begins to usher Matt out the door.

Benedic stops them with a heavy hand. "Chain his hands first."

Derran's face falls. "Surely, sir, it's not necessary? I don't think—"

"It doesn't matter what you think or I think, boy. Just do it." Benedic turns on his heel and stalks out, his face grim.

Derran and another guard bind Matt's hands and hustle him out the door, through the courtyard, into the castle. Derran does not speak to Matt or look at him.

They come to a meeting room and wait outside. Matt and the guards, until the door cracks open and they are told to enter. As the door opens, heads swivel, stare. Sitting around a long table are Captain Benedic, the Mother, the mage Truax, Lord Everard, a few other Velorin advisers and officers, and a woman who looks enough like the little girl, Felice, that she must be the queen. The king, splendid in gold brocade, sits at the middle of the table on an ornate throne.

In a cluster at the other end sits another group, the Salvandi. Matt feels no shock of recognition. They are slender, pale people dressed in furs; they stare at Matt, expressionless. The queen glares at him. Benedic does not look at him at all.

A Velorin rises from her place beside the king and clears her throat. "So, Your Majesties, ladies and gentlemen. Are we ready for the next item on the agenda?" The Velorin glance down at the table, shuffle papers, cough. The Salvandi continue to stare coldly at Matt. He can't tell which of them visited his room last night.

"Ahem. The next item is the Salvandi assassin, Mattamdar." The Velorin beckons and the guards pull Matt a step closer to the table. "Is there a proposal?"

In response, one of the Salvandi rises. "We propose only this." His voice is accented and as sharp and cold as shards of ice. "These talks cannot continue until Mattamdar is returned to us." He sits down, gracefully.

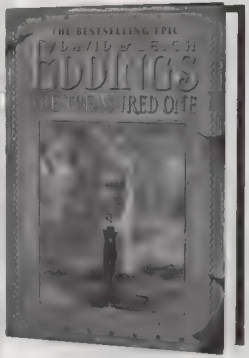
At his words, there is uproar. Felice's mother and several of the Velorin object loudly; the king blusters, Lord Everard looks keenly around the room. The Mother frowns, and Benedic gives Matt a quick, concerned

New from Aspect

ASPECT'S 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

From *New York Times* bestsellers
David & Leigh Eddings

A MAJOR FORCE IN FANTASY
CONTINUES THEIR ENTHRALLING EPIC



Farmers and hunters, soldiers and madmen, mortals and gods—all charge to a battle that will decide the fate of the world....

"Eddings is one of the best fantasy writers publishing today."
—*Orlando Sentinel*

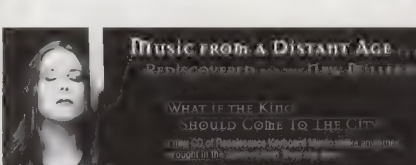
Available in hardcover and as an eBook
Read an Excerpt Online at www.twbookmark.com

Read the first in the series—
now in paperback

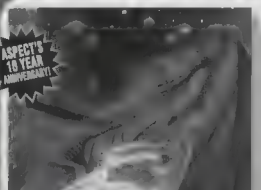
"Believable and engaging." *Library Journal*

ASPECT Where Imagination Knows No Bounds
Time Warner Book Group

Also available as an eBook



The second novel in the brilliant
Dragon Throne
series has arrived!



In a land where humans live with dragons....

The war that began in *The Stone of the Stars* has expanded to threaten all the worlds of the Celestial Empire. Now, the future depends on one young woman who must fulfill her destiny...or be destroyed by the darkest evil she has ever known.

Available in paperback

"Baird has produced a real winner, sure to please current fans and appeal to many new ones." – *Publishers Weekly* on *The Stone of the Stars*

CARPATINA
MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE
CLOAKS and CAPES

Medieval and Renaissance style cloaks, capes, tunics and gowns created in the finest wools and velvets. We also offer a line of hand-crafted peasant blouses imported from Transylvania.

Visit us at **www.carpatina.com** or call 603-881-3443 for a catalogue.

glance

The Velonn taps on the table After an interval, quiet is restored

The Salvandi delegate rises again and glances coolly around the table "It seems that you need time to make up your minds." Matt hears in the Salvandi's voice scorn for the foolish king and the soft Velonn "We will leave you to consider our proposal." As one, the Salvandi rise and pace from the room

The moment they are gone, Lord Everard rises from his chair, hair meticulously curled and oiled, clothes immaculate, useless sword dangling at his side "We cannot return the assassin to his masters," he says smoothly. "If we did, the Salvandi would simply send him back against us, to kill again I recommend that we try to reason with the Salvandi—they have more to lose than we do—and have Mattamdar executed when they've gone " The queen and several others nod agreement

The king looks torn. "I don't think the Salvandi will be reasonable about this, Everard. You saw them I think we must return the assassin or the talks will fail "

With a scrape, Captain Benedic pushes back his chair and gets to his feet, "I agree with Lord Everard " The other man shoots Benedic a confused look. Everard has not expected support from this quarter Benedic turns toward Matt, his face grim "Matt, if we return you, what will the Salvandi do with you?"

"They'll kill me." As he speaks, his voice shakes, though he tries to control it

"Unlikely," Everard says "He's trying to manipulate us "

But Benedic knows that Matt is not lying The captain looks down at his fists, clenched on the tabletop He shakes his head

"Explain your reasoning, Captain." The king wants to send him away, Matt understands To be rid of a problem

"My reasoning is this, Sire. I believe Matt is telling the truth that he will be killed by his own people—because to the Salvandi, a failed assassin is a dead assassin. To put Matt into Salvandi hands is to sacrifice him for no reason "

The king stares at Benedic, puzzled "Sacrifice? Captain, what are you talking about? This is Mattamdar. A killer There is no question about his guilt. If he is under sentence of death from his own people, all the better It is no more than he deserves

"No, Sire " Benedic looks around the table "I believe we need to take responsibility for what we have done. For Truax's chamber The old Mattamdar was probably the most dangerous man alive; he killed Duke Ferrol, planned to assassinate the rest of the royal family, killed twelve of my guards, and wounded many more." He fixes his gaze on Matt "But I don't believe that this is the same man "

"What?" the king sputters. "Of course it's the same man." He points "He is Mattamdar, the

assassin. We all know who he is." The courtiers nod agreement.

To Matt's surprise, the Mother rises from her chair. "Sire," she says in her harsh voice, "I agree with Captain Benedic." She turns to face the others at the table. "The chamber is a terrible thing. It is a new magic that we have not considered deeply enough. There are questions about it that need to be answered. Can a man who has emerged from the chamber be held responsible for crimes he committed before?"

"But he is the same man!" exclaims the King, frustrated.

"Is he?" asks the Mother.

The king snorts. "I have no patience for these philosophical arguments. I say he goes back."

"I change my recommendation," says Everard unexpectedly. "I now agree with the king." The others at the table turn to stare at him. He shrugs. "I can see that His Majesty is determined. We should send the assassin back to be dealt with as his own kind know best." Others nod agreement; the Mother shakes her head and resumes her seat.

"Well then," the king says, pleased. "It is settled. The assassin is returned to the Salvandi, to do with as they will, and the talks can go on."

Benedic rises again, moving slowly, as if he is tired. "I'm afraid I must again disagree, Sire. There is another reason we cannot send Matt back to the Salvandi."

"Now what?"

"If you recall, Sire," Benedic begins, "you gave Matt the run of the castle. He had weeks to discover all of our weaknesses and strengths. The guard I sent with him says that the boy saw the armory, the barracks, the defensive arrangements on the battlements, the extent of our siege supplies. He knows too much. Even if, out of some loyalty to the only people he knows, he refuses to tell the Salvandi what he has seen, they will torture him until he does. I repeat: we cannot put him into their hands."

"But Captain Benedic," insists the king, "we must send him back or the talks will fail. And Lord Everard and I are absolutely counting on them to succeed. I am tired of sending Velorin soldiers to fight an unwinnable war against these savages."

Benedic opens his mouth as if to argue further, then shakes his head and slowly resumes his seat.

Even before the mage moves, Matt recognizes the inevitability of what is going to happen next. He clenches his hands behind his back, willing them not to shake.

Truax rises nervously and clears his throat. "I believe I may have a solution, Your Majesty, Captain Benedic."

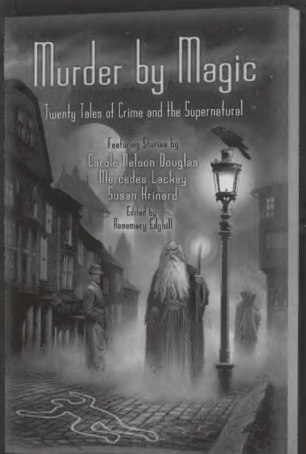
Benedic bows his head; he, too, knows what the mage is going to propose.

Truax continues. "I may venture to say, Sire, that the best solution to the problem at hand is a rather simple one." He gives a self-satisfied smile. "We simply put the assassin back into

NEW FROM ASPECT

Twenty Tales of Crime and the Supernatural

MURDER BY MAGIC



20 original stories from acclaimed science fiction, mystery, romance, and fantasy writers, including:

Carole Nelson Douglas

Mercedes Lackey

Susan Krinard

Diane Duane

Jennifer Roberson

and many more.

ASPECT'S 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY!

Available in paperback

Read an Excerpt Online
www.twbookmark.com

ASPECT Where Imagination Knows No Bounds

Time Warner Book Group

Worlds of Wonder Art

Specializing in Original Fantasy & Science Fiction Art

Available Now Catalog #19

$15 ppd U.S. ($20 overseas)

Worlds of Wonder Art

P.O. Box 814-ROF, McLean, VA 22101
703-847-4251 • fax: 703-790-9519

Visit us online: www.wow-art.com

"Worlds of Wonder" is a trademark of DDMA, Inc.
©Tom Kidwiler of Worldscape and is used under license

A World Where The Most Magical Occurrences Come From Within

Light reveals the evil hidden by darkness, and darkness manipulates light to deceive individuals if they stray from their principles.

The door opens. Which will emerge … a dragon of light or a dragon of darkness?

The Brazen Serpent Chronicles—Talon of Light

can be ordered at most bookstores

1-4107-6669-1 (Soft Cover)
1-4107-5835-4 (Hard Cover)
1-4107-6670-5 (E-book)

Order Online At
www.Authorhouse.com
www.Amazon.com
www.BarnesandNoble.com

The author delivers on the promise and provides the reader with an excellent story that is hard to put down. –*Writers Digest*

Visit the Brazen Serpent Chronicles Website
www.brazenserpentchronicles.com

Meet R. Dennis Baird this December at Gen Con So Cal in Anaheim!

Clarion
The Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers' Workshop

June 12 - July 22, 2005
Writers-in-Residence:
Joan Vinge * Charles Coleman Finlay
Gwyneth Jones * Cory Doctorow
Walter Jon Williams * Leslie What
Editor in Residence: To Be Announced

Application Deadline: April 1, 2005

For more information contact with SASE
Clarion Workshop, 112 Olds Hall
MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824-1047
Visit www.msu.edu/~clarion/

Discover the world of Dancing Dragon where dragons roam free!

www.legendsoffantasy.com
Join the "Dragons Court" online, a unique club for dracophiles.
www.dancingdragon.com

the chamber of forgetting. He forgets all he knows about the castle, and then we turn him over to the Salvandi. Even if they interrogate him, he won't be able to tell them anything."

A brief silence follows his suggestion, then murmuring as they consider it. Benedic puts his face in his hands.

The Mother stands, scowling. "Sire, I protest. The Salvandi will torture the boy for information he no longer possesses. It is unthinkable!"

"The boy," Everard jeers. "Listen to her. I agree with Truax. As His Majesty said, it is no more than the assassin deserves."

"Yes, indeed. Sit down, Honored Mother." The king turns to the mage. "Well done, Truax. You've solved the problem quite nicely."

The mage wriggles. "Thank you, Sire."

"When can you make the chamber ready, Mage?" Everard asks, his cold smile back in place.

"Immediately, my Lord. The preparations take only a few minutes."

"Well then." The king rises and claps his hands. "We shall pause for a meal, and when we return the assassin will be ready. Very good."

The manacles binding Matt's hands are loose. He would need only a moment to bring his hands around to the front, to draw the dagger from his pocket and kill Derran, Benedic, the king. He could make this room a chamber of blood and death and horror. Mattamdar would have done it. But Matt cannot.

As the guards pull him from the room, Derran whispers, "I'm sorry, Matt. I had to tell him."

"What?" Matt is distracted, thinking of the Salvandi, thinking about what will happen when they get their hands on him.

"I told the captain about youR seeing the armory," Derran goes on, his voice shaking. "I didn't know it was a bad thing."

They have left the castle and are crossing the courtyard. The mage, Truax, leads the procession, followed by Benedic, looking grim, and the Mother, and finally Matt and his guards.

Matt glances at the other boy, who seems close to tears. "It's all right, Derran." The guard gives a sigh of relief.

They come to the stairway and go up, clattering, to the whitewashed corridor, they pass Matt's cell and come to another room. Matt remembers it from before, the bars of sunlight on the floor, the frightened guards, the dark inner doorway. The mage has begun chanting under his breath, drawing sigils around the door to the chamber and making intricate movements with his hands. Benedic paces to one of the walls and leans back against it, his gaze on the floor. The Mother stands frowning at the mage.

Matt cannot stop the shaking now, and the chains on his hands clink together, loud in the room's hush.

"Strip him," Truax orders, intent on his spells.

Derran looks at Benedic for direction.

The captain nods without looking up. With trembling hands, Derran unfastens the ties at the neck of Matt's shirt, pulls it over his head. Pauses. "Uh, sir?"

"Unchain his hands, Derran," Benedic says with uncharacteristic patience.

Derran does so, then helps Matt to remove the rest of his clothing, his boots. As Derran picks up the trousers, Matt's dagger falls from the pocket and clatters onto the floor. At the noise, everyone in the room freezes, staring at the weapon; even Truax stops muttering to himself.

"It's all right, Derran," Benedic says quietly. "If he were planning to use it, he would have done so already."

Derran gives Matt a bewildered look as he stoops for the dagger.

"Give it here," Benedic says, and Derran obeys.

At the chamber door, the mage finishes his chanting and nods complacently. "Good. All ready." He glances at Matt. "Is that wise, Captain? Shouldn't his hands be chained?"

Benedic looks up from his contemplation of the floor, fierce. "Shut up, Mage, and do your job."

"But—" Truax hesitates, shrugs. "We must put him in immediately."

"Get on with it!"

The mage flinches. He glances again at Matt and blinks, an expression of confusion crossing his face. "I suppose he doesn't look too dangerous." He looks away. Clearing his throat, he adds, "You can say goodbye, if you like."

The Mother steps up to Matt, murmuring a prayer. She lifts her hand and, with a gentle finger, brushes his cheek, then leans forward and kisses him softly. "My good wishes go with you, Matt." She steps back.

"All right," Benedic says quietly. "Put him in."

Beside him, Derran is weeping. He and the other guard take Matt's arms and pull him toward the chamber. In the doorway, Matt resists, struggling against the guards' hands, and half turns to the captain, a step behind him.

"Benedic," he gasps. "Make him leave me in too long."

He has time to see Benedic nod once, understanding, before he is pushed hard from behind.

He stumbles into the chamber. The door slams shut behind him. The air is frigid, dry. Matt crouches on the floor just inside the door, his arms wrapped around himself, shivering. The air darkens around him and a web of glowing sigils pulses from the wall.

The body remembers, Matt thinks. His remembers torture; it remembers how to kill. But it also remembers the touch of gentle hands, the warmth of autumn sunlight, a last kiss.

Then all goes dark, and everything is forgotten.

MIDWAY

Wield the Power of the Judgment Ring to Fullfill Your Destiny

A fantastical world filled with ancient magic, mystical lore, unspeakable curses and a diabolical plot

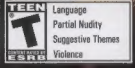
Combine split second timing and skillful combat strategy to master the Judgment Ring's powerful and stackable attacks

Fight as a Harmonizer and transform into more than 20 astonishing creatures

SHADOW HEARTS COVENANT™

AMIDST THE CHAOS OF WORLD WAR I, YURI AND KARIN EMBARK ON AN EPIC JOURNEY TESTING THEIR POWER AND MAGIC SKILLS WITH THE JUDGMENT RING TO COMBAT TERRIFYING CREATURES AND CONQUER THE EVIL THAT RASPUTIN PLANS TO UNLEASH UPON THE WORLD.

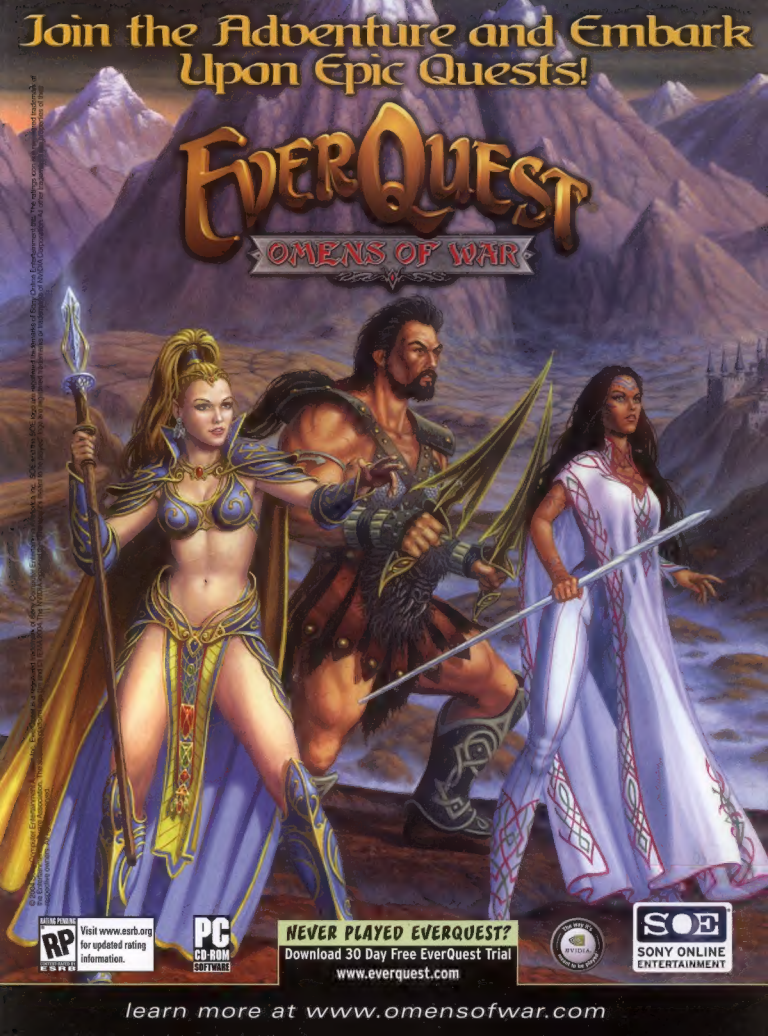
shadowheartscovenant.com



Sunsoft

ARUZE GROUP

PlayStation 2


Join the Adventure and Embark Upon Epic Quests!
EverQuest
OMENS OF WAR
RATING PENDING
RP
Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.
ESRB
PC
CD-ROM SOFTWARE
NEVER PLAYED EVERQUEST?
Download 30 Day Free EverQuest Trial
www.everquest.com
SOE
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
learn more at www.omensofwar.com